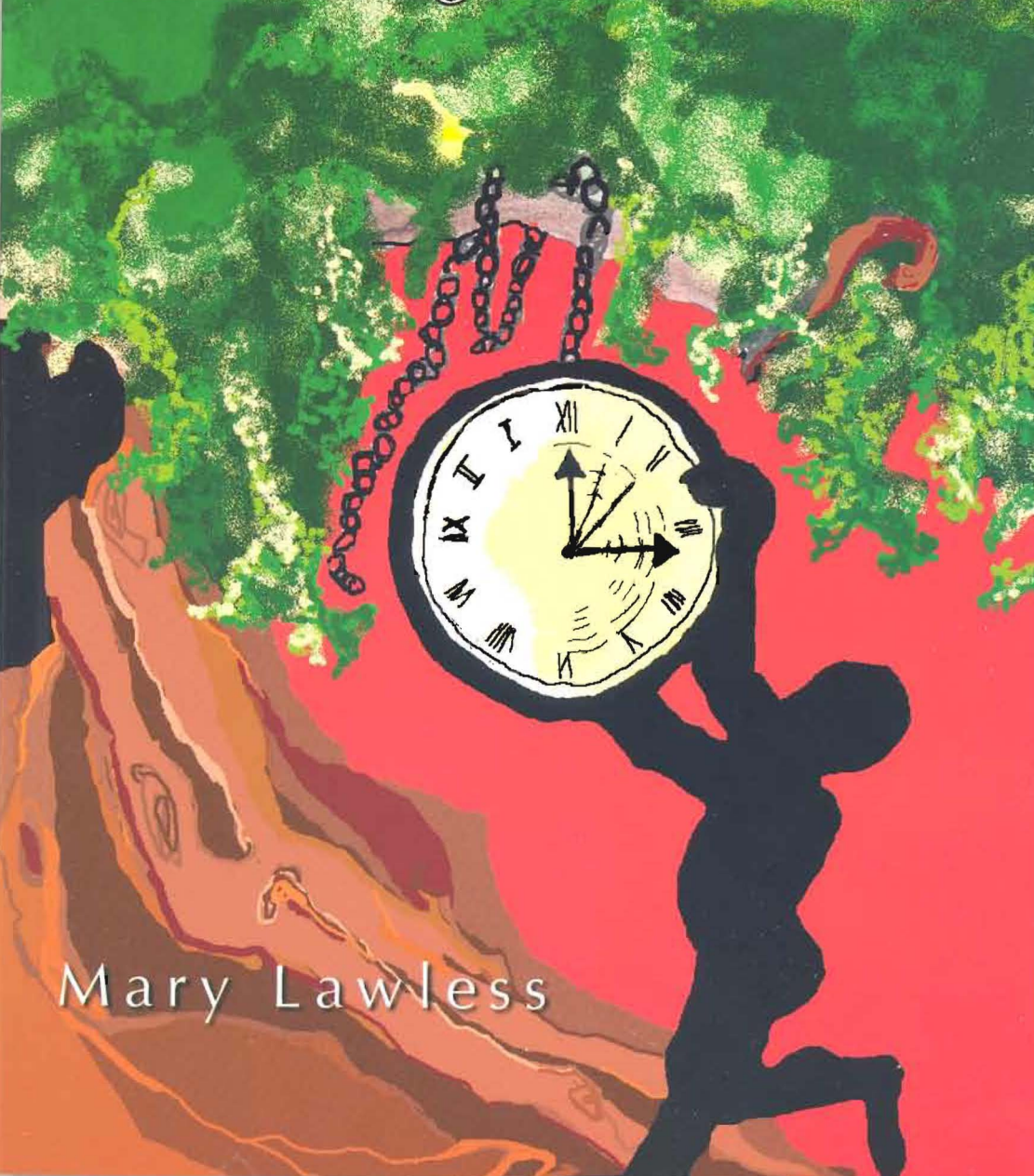


It's Now O'Clock!

Positive Living in Turbulent Times



Mary Lawless

It's Now O'Clock!

Positive Living in Turbulent Times

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South East Radiotherapy Trust***

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Authors Note

For the past number of years I have been a regular columnist on life issues for local and regional newspapers in the Munster region. This book is in response to the popularity of those articles and you now have the opportunity to dip in and out at will and sample a common sense approach to life and living.

It's Now O'Clock looks at the way you are living your life right now while at the same time encouraging you to find positive ways to change and improve your personal effectiveness. In this book there is no seven day 'do it yourself' plans or quick fix magic solutions for the reader. What you will find instead are thoughts on everyday issues which are designed to help you to look at yourself and those around you with a new perspective. Ultimately, this thought provoking book challenges you to live fully all the days of your life!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who made *It's Now O'Clock* possible; My husband John who always got me out of a 'crisis' when my computer developed a mind of its own! My nieces, Sandra Norris who designed all the illustrations and whose rich artistic talent you can clearly see throughout this book; to Michelle Norris who proof read, helped co-ordinate the book launch and whose background support was invaluable. Thanks girls, your help was much appreciated! Special thanks also to Gordon Watson, Liz and Margaret (SERT) who believed in and supported the concept of this book from the beginning.

I would like to thank all the people I have met throughout my own life journey who have influenced me in a positive way. Last but by no means least to my loyal readers who over the years encouraged me to write this book. Ultimately, it was your encouragement that brought this book to fruition!

Mary Lawless
June 2010

*This book is dedicated to John whose
unconditional love and support has enabled me to
live life to the fullest and beyond*

Foreword

The South-East Radiotherapy Trust, (SERT) was launched in November 2005, by Minister for Health and Children, Ms. Mary Harney, in response to her decision to provide public radiotherapy facilities for the South-East, at Waterford. The principle aim of the Trust is the support of radiotherapy services in the region and its immediate objective was to provide suitable vehicles to convey cancer patients from their homes to Radiotherapy Units for their treatment on a daily basis.

Within a very short time, the workforce at Bausch and Lomb provided two vehicles which were put into service immediately. As a result of many other fund-raising events, and the support of Industry and Trade Unions, all of which is ongoing throughout the region, additional vehicles were purchased for Kilkenny, Wexford and South Tipperary. These are driven by over 130 volunteers who are organised into local teams. SERT now transports, free of charge, over 50% of all patients from the region who require Radiotherapy at UPMC, Waterford. The group in Dungarvan has a second team which transports patients west of the region, for treatment at Cork University Hospital. In addition, a SERT ambulance transports in-patients between hospitals in Waterford.

With the continuing support of people throughout our communities, at all levels, we can develop, and make a significant impact towards helping patients with cancer, on their journey to recovery. I thank Mary Lawless, not only for donating the proceeds of this book to SERT, but, having read some of her articles, I feel the contents will be a source of inspiration, not just to cancer patients, but to all who take the time to read it.

Mr. Gordon Watson, M.A., Ch.M., FRCSI, FRCS (Edin.), FRCS.
Consultant Surgeon
Chairman of SERT

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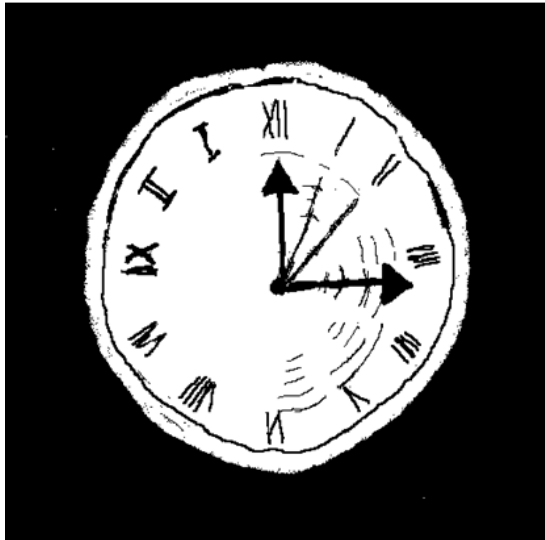
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Your Life is Now!



It's Now O'Clock!

Do you ever get the feeling that you are not really present where you are? At times all of us get distracted from what we are doing and may feel that 'if only' this or that was different my life would be so much better! The funny thing is that the present moment is all that we have. Not focusing on the present is to deny what is really happening now in favour of what may or may not happen in the future.

Realising that the present moment is all we have takes a bit of practice. Try it as a challenge over the upcoming weeks; practice it even for just a few minutes at a time. Whatever is happening in a particular point in your day, act as if you had a choice in it and see what difference it will make to your actions. The present moment may not be of your choosing but focusing on the past or future may not serve you well.

As your life unfolds every day, it has peaks and troughs. In trying to be somewhere other than where you are, you may never feel satisfied and content. So next time you are getting a bit stressed or impatient or cross with yourself about something – try asking – what time it? Instead of looking at your watch (which might put more pressure on you!) try saying - IT'S NOW O'CLOCK and make the NOW of that time the most important thing in your life.

Are you waiting for your life to begin?

Quite often you will hear people say - I will be happy when I have 'X' sorted out. "X" could be a house, job, relationship, the ironing basket, that pressing "In" tray at work etc.... the list is endless! Have you ever thought that you are living now and that you may never get a chance to reach that perfect state? In the meantime you may have missed the chance to live in the moment. The years of your life may be passing you by but are you waiting in the sidelines for your cue that says it is your turn to be happy?

Try this exercise for a moment – Think about your worries and problems, all those things that you think are stopping you from being happy at the moment, look a little closer at these issues. Are they about the future? These may be issues which may or may not happen, or are they about the past which you cannot change and over which you have no control. Then ask yourself this question – why are you carrying around this baggage and is it stopping you from seeing what you have right now in life?

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to your happiness and living in the moment is yourself; you may be the one standing in your own way. If you would like to change your life in some way but are afraid of failure why not ask yourself what have I got to lose? The past is gone and the future is yet to come; only the present moment is real.

Living in the moment will draw you away from the past towards a happier present time. Let go of anything that holds you back and step forward into a brighter happier life.

Is this all there is?

Children find it quite easy to get excited and be passionate about something. They rush to play with their friends with eager anticipation. Why does it seem so difficult to find the same passion as an adult?

When was the last time you felt excited about something? Or do you think that you are too old and sensible for excitement? If you are having trouble thinking when the last time was, it may explain why you wake up some mornings, look at the day ahead you end up asking yourself ‘is this all there is?’

Perhaps you are too laden down with perceived responsibilities. Quite often you may be spending too much time focusing on those around you, family, work, and have lost yourself in the process. You may not have had any time to devote to what you really want to do. Now may be the time to change. If you had an hour to do just one thing that would make you smile, what would it be? Start just by thinking of small things that will encourage but will not overwhelm you. Bit by bit add some more things that will be more of what you want to do. You may be surprised at the results.

Be creative; don’t be afraid to step out of the comfort zone you have created for yourself. Is there a special place you want to visit, or an adventure you want to try but keep putting off? Will the time ever be right for it? Why not do it now! The well known expression ‘mid life crisis’ is often used to describe someone who has embarked on a completely different path in their life. If you know someone who has done this – what emotions did it evoke in you – envy? Restlessness? If you want to have some of that spark in your life, why wait until mid life?

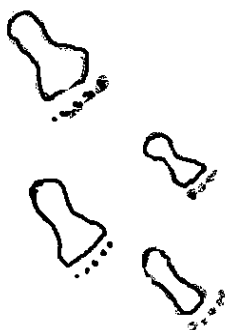
Live all the days of your life

Ever sat down to your favourite meal or snack and suddenly its finished and you wonder if you have even tasted it. Life is a bit like that when we are doing one thing and thinking about something else. Perhaps you put on a CD and you hardly notice which song is playing. How many areas in your life could this apply to?

Try a little experiment with me – note where your thoughts are when you are doing something. Are you at work thinking about home and at home thinking about work? If you are out walking how many trees and birds do you notice? Do you hurry quickly by to make sure you get home to watch your favourite TV programme?

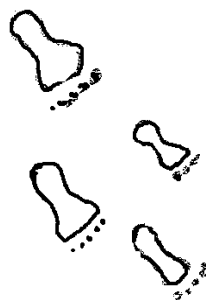
Life's lessons don't always have to be serious and meaningful. Quite often it is the simplest thing that may strike a chord and stop you in your tracks. Live every moment of your life to the fullest. If you forget and get disheartened - don't worry!- just pick yourself up and start again.

Live in the moment of where you are no matter what you are doing and you will feel the difference. Try this with some humour and laugh at yourself when you see that you are getting too serious about something. After all - today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday!



**Life can only be understood backward,
but it must be lived forward**

Anon



A relaxing holiday

During holiday time many people will take a break from the routine of work and home by taking a well earned rest. You might decide to take a holiday in Ireland or go further field. Whatever your destination, try not to make it hard work!

Planning beforehand is crucial to the success of your time away. Arrange a holiday that fulfils your needs. Do you want to look at historic sites with guide book in hand or just laze in the sun? What do your friends and family want? If you are not travelling alone, sort out compromises before you go away and set realistic expectations. This hopefully will keep everyone happy!

If you have various tasks to complete at work before you go, decide how important they really are. Do you really need to exhaust yourself at work or at home to go away with an easy mind. If it does not get done what are the consequences? Don't feel that you have to clear all those tasks that you were putting off all year in the run up to your holidays. If you waited this long could it wait until you get back?

Being in control of what you need to do before your holiday will go a long way to relieving your stress. A lot of enjoyment of holidays is the planning and talking it beforehand. Once you get there live in the moment of it and forget all about what you did or did not do before you left. Enjoy the time and the NOW of your holiday and relax, be good to yourself and come back renewed.

What would you do if you had the time - Be happy?

So much to do, so little time as the old saying goes. If you **had** the time what would you do? Catch up on old household jobs, write those outstanding letters, visit neglected friends and relatives, learn a new language, take a holiday, get more qualifications and then would you be happy? As you can see the list is endless. What would happen once all those things had been done, would you replace them with other things thus continuing the cycle?

Without being aware of it some people have these to “do lists” just to keep them unfocused on what is happening now. The only time we have is NOW and if you really want and intend to do something don’t put it off. Try not to let the things you feel you should be doing interfere with the here and now. Listen to yourself and see if you are making excuses and letting yourself off the hook. Allocate time for what you **can and really intend to do** and then let the rest go. There will never be a perfect time to do what you want and need. So why not start now before it is too late.

So decide to be happy now whatever your constraints or personal situation. Stop waiting to have time to be happy..... Until your car is paid off, until your children leave for college, until you get married, get divorced, until you can get a better job, until you have children, until the long evenings in the summer, until you retire..... Until.....Until..... Until.

What would you miss if

We all get our strengths from different things and in times of difficulties draw on them as a resource. Today, why not look at the resources that have got you through to this point in your life so far.

Would it be the stillness of quiet time with a lighting candle, a walk on the beach, gardening, listening to your favourite radio programme or spending time with friends or family. These resources are like a warm glow that helps us deal with times of stress and pressure. So what would you miss if it was not there? What if some of those things were to disappear, what would you do then?

It may be helpful to make a list of things and people that are really important to you i.e. the type of things that if missing in your life would leave a gap. How much time do you spend on them, could you spend more? If you did would the quality of your life improve? Recognise the time spent on these activities as a resource that gives you strength to be you.

If you are neglecting that which is important to you, make a conscious decision not to let it disappear from your life. Try to imagine how much better your life would be if you had more of these resources. Would you be less anxious, less stressed and more in control? Only you can answer these questions. Whatever your answer, be aware of your need to draw strength from something outside yourself. In raising your awareness of the need for inner strength make a conscious decision (if only for five minutes extra a day) to spend more time on yourself.

What does the future hold for you?

Do you ever wonder what your life will be like in one or two year's time, where you will be? If it is not something you have given any thought to recently, consider the difference it would make to know where you are going in life and why you are going there. Although we need to live in the NOW of our life we also need to imagine a future for ourselves; a time which has not been lived before; a time which is not coloured by our experiences of the past but is a mixture of old and new. It may not be possible to have a precise picture of this future, but we need a general sense of the sort of life we want. If you don't know where you are going then you won't know when you get there!

Why not take a few minutes to think about what your future could look like? If you like what you see, well done, you are obviously on the right track! If your future seems a little grey and distant, and not as you would like it to be try pushing the boundaries of your comfort zone and see where it might bring you. Write a few sentences about what you want in this future, and what you want it to feel like. Yes, of course, I know that none of us can actually predict the future as we can't know what is actually going to happen to us. We can however, formulate a picture, an outline of what we would like it to be. To live your life without any view of where you are going may result in time and energy being lost just plodding through every day without any particular purpose. However, if you have that picture it will make all the difference.

Making your goals count NOW and in the future

If you have a future in mind which is somewhat different than your present life, then a vision or a dream is not enough. In order to move beyond 'thinking' your next phase is 'doing'. Here you will need to set goals and ways to chart your progress.

With your goal in mind, try not to lose sight of the fact that the present time is all we have. Try to live in the moment of NOW but all the time keeping your eye on the target of what you want your life to be. If you think that your past is holding you back, remember you have a choice. Unless you want it to be, **you're past is not your future**. Your future is a blank sheet waiting for you to make your imprint on it. Your goals are milestones along that journey, some days you will move forward at a rapid pace, other days you will feel that you are going backwards. You cannot control all the events that surround you that may push you off track. Remember your dreams and hopes are what keep you going along the way. Keep them in mind when the going gets tough.

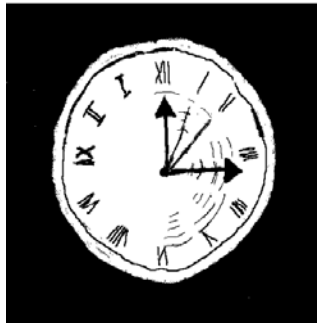
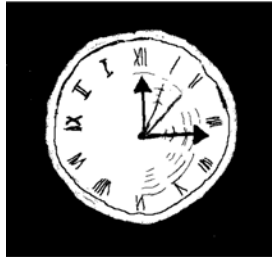
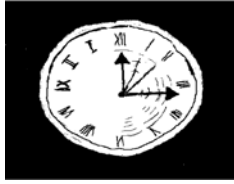
When you feel that you have made even a little bit of progress, review where you have come from and reward yourself for a job well done. You may not be at your goal but it will be nice to acknowledge that you are on the right track. If you have diverted a bit from your goal, start again but don't lose heart!

Live every day as if it were your.....?

Many of us will have heard the saying 'live every day as if it were your last' and simply let it go over our heads somewhere into a place far away. What if today was really your last day? What regrets do you have, things undone, wishes to fulfil?

Unfortunately someday will be your last one and more than likely you will not know it. If you did know what difference would it make? My guess would be that it would make a lot of difference. So what can you do about it? Stop putting things off would be one thing. If you have a dream or a wish to visit some place or do something, or even mend some bridges with someone the time may never be right to do it, so why not start now? Perhaps you are in a job or relationship that you are not happy in, or have friends who do not support you, or any number of things that you are unhappy with. Indeed you may be happy with your lot and have a few unfulfilled minor ambitions, why not achieve those and make your life even better.

Another saying is 'write a list of 99 things to do before you die'. Why not start with a smaller number say 5 – 10 things, write that list now and see what you come up with. How many of them can you do in the foreseeable future while you have your health and the means to do it? My guess is most of them if you really put your mind to it! Well what are you waiting for? You only have today after all with no guarantees of tomorrow!



**It is not as important to count time, as it is
to make time count**

Anon

Want a simple life?

Many of us are familiar with those around us (or indeed even ourselves) saying that they want a simple life. Noting too complicated but just enough to live on and get by, mindful of the fact that the current economic climate in Ireland may also have others wondering if they can even afford to live that simple life.

What is your version of a simple life? You could begin by asking yourself ‘what would I really miss in my life if it were to disappear’, (try not to answer with any type of consumer goods!). Living a simple life whatever your version is can make life less complicated. It may lead you to ask yourself on a regular basis ‘do I really need X to make me happy and content?’ If the answer is NO then move on and embrace your ever simpler life.

Taking time to sit back to look at what you want and need in life may also help you to slow down and appreciate the simple things such as a butterfly busily flying around, or indeed a sleeping cat who is number one in their own world, who displays no sign of stress or worry. These are the things that a simple life is full of if only we took to time to appreciate and understand them.

So what is your version of a simple life and what are you going to do to create it.? Quite often such a life is right in front of us but we just need to take the time to create and incorporate it into our every day actions. So what is **your** first step today towards creating your simple life?

Are you sleepwalking your life?

You may have read in the papers or even seen on TV someone talking about a challenge they undertook in life. This could be running a marathon, volunteering for some charity work, or even writing a book. What feelings did it evoke in you? Admiration, envy, perhaps mixed with a little bit of uneasiness? Did you wish it had been you or did you think I am not brave enough, smart enough, old enough, young enough..... etc. to do as others do. Somehow we make these negative judgements about ourselves everyday. Perhaps if you think that such challenges are for someone else you may need to ask yourself - are you sleepwalking through your life?

Life presents many opportunities to us that we may not even consider as it may move us out of our comfort zone. Think about it for a minute. What did you do this year so far that you have not done before? Do you have any plans to do something really different in the coming weeks? This does not have to cost money – the only restriction is your imagination! - If your present and the future all sound a bit predictable what would it take to wake you out of this sleepwalking?

Would it take the sudden illness of a friend to make you think that life is very short? Or will you wait until you hear someone else talking about taking on a new challenge before you again consider getting outside of your own comfort zone? Why put off something that is simmering in the back of your mind! You may not have tomorrow and all you are guaranteed is the present moment that you are living in. The *NOW* of your life can be predictable and comfortable or it can be filled with endless possibilities. Only you can decide if you are sleepwalking through your life or if you are fully awake to opportunities in the *NOW*.

Blink

Recently I read a book called *Blink - The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* by Malcolm Gladwell. Published in 2005 this book deals with thinking about what happens in the blink of an eye. For example when you meet someone new or when you see something nice that you would like to buy, your mind takes a jump to a conclusion. Its hard to explain but either in a negative or positive way you feel a connection in some way. This feeling/conclusion takes about two seconds and Gladwells book is about the importance of and the influence of those two seconds in our life.

So this book is about intuition you might think? No, it is more than that as Gladwell feels that intuition has a feeling of not being rational. Instead he points out that what goes on in the first two seconds of our interactions in life are very rational indeed. *Blink* is about understanding these two very important seconds. Sometimes we need to reflect on the situations we find ourselves in. At other times we need to believe in and recognise the value of those two seconds, in other words *Blink!* and trust ourselves enough to know that our first impressions really do matter. It is about knowing without knowing why!

Blink is about the small moments that make up or daily lives. It is about how we feel in those first few seconds when we are involved in a new or complex situation. Gladwell feels that if we paid more attention to and trusted those few seconds more we would look at life in a different way. Those fleeting moments say a lot about us and *Blink* encourages us to value them more. By trusting your instincts *Blink* encourages you to never think in the same way again!

Have you arrived?

Most of us have ambitions for our lives. Be happy, healthy and have little worry or stress with enough money to live on. Whether or not we are aware of it these are things that we all strive for throughout our lives. Sometimes though we are so intent on going somewhere we don't realise that we have arrived already.

So let's look at your life as it is today. What are the things you are happy about and what are you still working on? What progress have you made and what are you content with? Then ask yourself have you made progress with some of your thoughts and wishes for your life. If yes, then perhaps you have already arrived at some important point in your life?

Being in a contented place in life may have happened unknown to us. It may take some time of quiet reflection for you to realise that perhaps you too have arrived at such a place. It is good to plan and set goals but it is also important to take time to appreciate what is happening NOW in your life and enjoy it for what it is. So the next time that you are out walking or indeed sitting quietly staring out the window, ask yourself the question – HAVE YOU ARRIVED? If yes, well done you can begin or indeed continue to appreciate all that is good in your life. If you have still a way to go, consider if your arrival point is too far in the distance and whether you need to move that arrival point nearer to you. Being contented in life is a journey with stops along the way – where are you now in this journey?

**We are here and it is now.
Further than that all
human knowledge is moonshine!**

H.L. Mencken

Is it time for you to change?

In the past month were you happy with how things went? For example you made the most of your day or were you just the same as you normally are, wishing you had the time, interest and energy to enjoy your life but never quite got round to it. Then perhaps you need to look at what is happening. Now might be as good a time as any to make some decisions about your lifestyle, so that when the end of the year comes you will be able to look back and say that you made the most out of it!

Some people think and you may be one of them “when I get my holidays I will take some downtime and relax and appreciate what is around me”. However, as you build up to your break you may find yourself gathering speed to make up for the time that you will be away. This may lead you to live your life somewhere in the distant future, but what about the present? In living your life is your head down afraid of what you might see or are you looking backwards regretting what is past? Neither or which are very helpful if you want to make the most of everyday. Why not look at your life in a different way and see you have all that you need everyday right now in front of you, even though things are not perfect in your life. Just think about it, you have no control over tomorrow or what happened yesterday but you can change how you are today.

So if you need to change how you are, **NOW** may be a good time of year to start!

Could you do more good?

A wise person once said 'Every man is guilty of all the good he did not do'. Pause and consider this for a moment. What does it really mean? Does it mean that there are things that all of us could do in our life but are too busy or indifferent to do them. Or does it mean that even your best is not good enough as there is still more good to do? The answer that you come up with will be unique and individual to you as there are no right or wrong answers.

So let's take it that there are countless things and innumerable ways where we all could do more good everyday of our lives. Sometimes we take the opportunity to do it and other days we don't bother. So what is the difference in the times when we do good for others? It could be something simple like opening a shop door for someone or letting others go ahead of you in a queue.

Whatever you are doing ask yourself are you doing enough and if you can honestly say that you are then well done! You are certainly making a positive difference in the world. Alternatively you may be a bit uneasy and think you could be doing more. If you think this then decide TODAY to do something about it. Don't put it off until next month or year or when you have more time or money or whatever. The time may never be right. Deciding to do some good for others may have an initial cost in terms of your time or even in financial terms. However, the return to you in the long run through your peace of mind and contentment will more than repay the effort you made. So think about it 'could you do more good in the world? Well, what are you waiting for?

Do you need to be more mindful?

Our lives in the 21st Century are very much focused on speed and getting things done faster. Faster solutions to everyday life situations are everywhere! Sometimes though we may feel that we must be efficient all the time and as a result we may go through our normal days on autopilot without actually experiencing anything much.

Mindfulness is a concept of Buddhism and is about being present where you actually are. It is about slowing down our mind to be present. If you have not tried this before, begin by being conscious of and acknowledging your thoughts. Do not run away from them but welcome them. Then let them go and try not to be tempted to replace them with others. Pay attention to your breathing, you may be surprised to see that it is slowing down in to match your mind. Pay attention also to what is happening right at that very moment in your life and appreciate it for what it is in that moment. Let your thoughts go and empty your mind of the 'inner traffic'

Stopping and paying attention to our lives may take practice but in the long run it may be beneficial for you. It will slow your breathing down make you become more relaxed. Overall, by being mindful of the situation you are in you will be more attentive to what is important and that can only benefit you.

Do you want a perfect life?

So how is your day going so far today? Is it a nice easy day or is it a stressful day? Do you wish for this day to end or are you happy enough with the way things are? Checking in with ourselves during the day is not something we normally do. In the hurly burly of life we may forget to slow down and to 'smell the roses'. Our mind projects us backwards to the past or onwards onto the next thing and the next thing as we crash through a normal day. How would it be if instead of looking at your watch and rushing through your day that you would consider looking on your day as a gift to you from the *NOW* of your life?

Try as I might I have yet to meet someone who has a perfect life. To wish for it to happen instead of your current life is to deny what is happening right *NOW*. So if you are in a queue in the bank or indeed waiting in line for a parking space, you may feel your mind racing ahead to what you need to do if only you could get on with it! Funny though, feeling like this does not change anything.

So what if you were to consider that your life right now with it's 'warts and all' as the perfect life for you at this particular time? OK there may be things that we all wish were not there, but overall how would it be to view most things in your life as if you have actually chosen them? Think about that for a moment. What difference does it make to how you see things? So perhaps the next time you are frustrated when things are not going your way and you are waiting in line for something, consider it all part of your 'perfect life'. Perhaps a long way from perfection but a life valued and lived fully none the less!

Recycling Time

Whether we are aware of it or not sometimes we all waste time. It is important to relax and not always be active and running around the place. On the other hand some people are very attached to doing nothing a lot of the time. They put off doing things and procrastinate until it can be too late to doing something. This can become a pattern in some people's lives until they somehow are unable to motivate themselves.

While we all need to relax and take it easy, keep in mind that you cannot recycle time. Time and opportunities that you do not make the most of today are unlikely to present themselves in the same way tomorrow or even next week. So why not ask yourself are you making the most of the time you have now. Eckhart Tolle indicated in his groundbreaking book "The Power of Now", that there was never a time when your life was not NOW. In other words the now of the time that you are reading this is all you have control over but be rest assured this time will not come again. Just think of it seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months and years go by that you will never live again. Sobering thoughts indeed!

So now that you are aware that you cannot recycle time, what are you going to do in the next week or so to ensure in some way that you do not waste time needlessly? A good starting point may be to look at your day and see how you can make the most of something that you may never have again. How can you do and say what you need to without wasting time? It may sound a tall order but just by being mindful that you will cannot get back or recycle time may be enough to focus you.

Get out of your mind and be present !

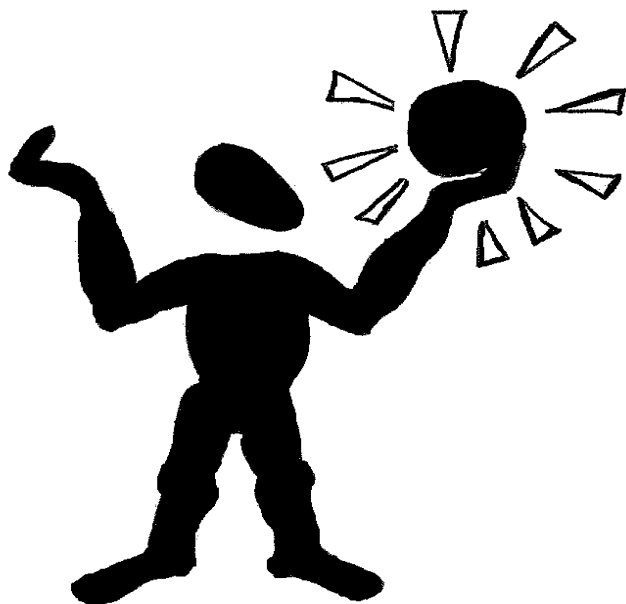
How present are you now as you read this page? Do you have one eye on the TV but are reading at the same time or are you half listening to someone as they speak to you? What ever you are doing STOP and try to get out of your mind and be present in this exact moment!

It sounds straight forward and it's almost as if I can hear you say 'that's easy, anyone can do it'. Why it is then is it not so easy to get someone's full attention these days? Try to practice it for a few minutes. How long are you really focused on something before you attention wanders? Eckhart Tolle in his eminent book 'The Power of Now' said that all of us do not want the present and would prefer instead the future. To be identified with time in your mind is to be trapped in the compulsion to live with our memories of the past or the anticipation of the future. Neither of these compulsions will serve you well as the past tries to give you an identity and the future appears to give the promise of salvation.

So to focus on the present you may need to literally get out of your mind! Ignore the incessant chatter and distractions that all of us feel and focus on the here and now. Bringing your total presence to where you are right now frees you from the stress of the past and the future. So there is no better time than right now to be present. As the following old saying goes:

Being happy and present is a journey not a destination. So work like you don't need money, love like you've never been hurt, and, dance like no one's watching!

Positive Living



Four Candles For Life

Author anonymous

Recently I received the following poem from a friend. When next you see a burning candle bring to mind thoughts of the following.....

The Four Candles burned slowly. The ambiance was so soft you could hear them speak

The first candle said, "I AM PEACE, but these days nobody wants to keep me lit" The Peace's flame slowly diminished and went out completely.

The second candle said, "I AM FAITH, but these days, I am no longer indispensable". Then Faith's flame slowly diminished and went out completely.

Sadly the third candle spoke, "I AM LOVE and I haven't the strength to stay lit any longer. People put me aside and don't understand my importance. They even forget to love those who are nearest to them" Waiting no longer, Love went out completely.

Suddenly.... A child entered the room and saw the three candles no longer burning and began to cry. "Why are you not burning? You are supposed to stay lit until the end"

Then the fourth candle spoke gently to the little boy "Don't be afraid, for I AM HOPE and while I still burn, we can re-light the other candles".

With shining eyes, the child took the Candle of Hope and lit the other three candles.

Never let the flame of Hope go out.
With Hope in your life, no matter how bad things may be,
Peace, Faith and Love may shine brightly once again

Making the right decision?

When you are faced with a decision do you procrastinate, weighing up the pros and cons endlessly and then feel paralysed with fear? Not knowing what to do, endlessly analysing the situation? And yet not getting to the heart of the matter? In such a situation you may go round and round and still end up at the same point. So how do you stop the cycle?

Quite often when we are making a decision we look at all the answers that sit ok with us. Things that make us (and others!) feel comfortable. We may not go outside of our comfort zone for fear that we might hear or say something that will upset the process. Instead of procrastinating about the same old thing, try not to accept answers at face value, probe a little and you will be surprised at the benefit it will give you. Think about it, how many times have you acted on something only to later find out that you had only half the information in the first place? To avoid a situation where you end up saying “but I thought.....” try to ask a question beforehand that is not so obvious. It may be helpful if you were to ask awkward questions – What could go wrong or right? What is my plan B? What is my bottom line in this situation? What is the worst thing that could happen?

When you have given a reasonable amount of time to a particular decision try to **STOP** the cycle and procrastinating; make a decision! Decide not to have any regrets, and go with your gut instinct. Any decision you make will be as a result of information you have at the given time. Your life needs to move on regardless of whether or not you have a perfect answer to your dilemma. It may not feel like it at the time but there is learning both in success and in failure and postponing a decision will not make it any easier. Doubts and regrets are part and parcel of every decision. Try to worry less about getting it right and instead trust yourself!

Motivation – Do you know where you are going?

Motivation is an internal force that will see us through when the going gets tough. However, if you do not know where you are going, it may be hard to visualise the end goal. Every wonder what you would like your life to be like by this time next year? More of the same? Does this sound like an exciting or scary prospect?

The sooner you can imagine in your mind where you are going, the sooner you will get there. This positive picture will draw you along the path to your goal and ultimately your success. Try not to procrastinate, if you are prone to it, it may be one of the ways that you get in your own way. Yes, there may be difficulties along the way, don't let that put you off. If you do you may find next year your life is still in the same place. Get rid of those old habits that hold you back, what have you got to lose? You will however, gain motivation and the lifestyle that you really want.

To maintain motivation in any area of your life, try breaking situations into manageable pieces. Create a deadline for completing your goals. If you do not succeed the first time, don't despair. Reward yourself for the progress you have made and start again the next day!

Happiness

If someone asked you today - are you happy? - what would your answer be? Would you hesitate and give a slow response while you thought about it or would you be able to answer straight away? Think about that for a minute.

Your response may indicate that things are not going too badly for you and you are indeed happy. Well done if you feel like this. You may need to check in every now and then to remind yourself that this is actually the case. No far away fields are greener but that you are happy right now.

If on the other hand you can honestly answer that you are unhappy, now may be as good a time as any to find out why and what you can do about it. This may involve doing a bit of soul searching to find out its cause. Whatever reasons you come up with for this unhappiness, ask what role you play in this feeling. Are you giving your power away to others be it at home or work by allowing others to unduly influence the way you feel about life and how you live it?

Whatever your feelings about whether or not you are happy consider that quite often the happiness of your life depends on the quality of your thoughts. By thinking happy thoughts you are giving yourself a head start in the happiness stakes. Try it and see.

How is your mind?

A wise person once said '*minds are like parachutes... they function well only when open*' Thought provoking words indeed! So what is your own mind like, are you open to changing your mind about things and as a result are receptive to new experiences? Or are you a bit rigid with your views and once your mind is made up you 'stick to your guns no matter what'? Life in 2010 is very different than even the year 2000. With this in mind now might be a good time for you to do a quick check with yourself to see whether or not your own 'parachute is open' and ask yourself do you need to update how you feel about things?

We all have standard responses to events. Such responses are the ways which make us what we are and define us. Today, why not think about how open or closed your mind is to new and challenging situations?. Do you sigh when met with such situations and hope they go away or do you shy away from them saying it is just 'not you'. Or on occasion are you willing to open your mind and perhaps question yourself about your views and actions and take a risk in a new situation ? What ever way you are 2010 may be a good time to do a check in with yourself and see do you need to move on from outdated beliefs and views. Alternatively, you may make the decision to stay as you are and that is ok too as long as you give yourself the option from time to time of changing your mind about something if the need arises.

So think about if your mind was a parachute would you be able to open it if the need arose?

Different strokes for different folks

Has it every struck you how different we all are? Does that make you feel uncomfortable? Some people have a set of standards (they may not even be aware of it) and expect everyone to fall within it. They may even describe people as winners or losers.

What is the effect of this on themselves and those around them? If you have a blinkered vision of what to expect from someone, will you be able to see or hear anything else? Try this simple exercise: The next time that you are in general conversation with someone leave your preconceptions behind. Imagine that this is the first time that you are speaking to them and have not heard their story before. Listen more than speak yourself; what effect does this have you or on the person you are talking to?

We all want and need to be heard and understood. Some of us may have more difficulty than others in making ourselves heard (in this I do not mean in the hearing sense!). However, just because a conversation is not framed in a way that we expect does not mean that the person is any less valid. Imagine what it must be like to have someone really listen to you; imagine what it is like to be really HEARD.

Would you like to be heard? Then the best way to be heard is to be open to it yourself and it will come your way. How powerful it is when it happens! Suddenly the goalposts are moved and preconceptions change. The funny thing is, that was there all along but we could not see or hear it. Why not set yourself the above challenge – you can only win as there are no winners or losers in life. Just people who are different doing their best!

What are your grievances?

Like it or not we all have some grievances in life. It might be that you feel that you are not recognised or treated well where you work, in your family, or by friends and neighbours. Think about that for a minute. What are the things that on bad days can rear their ugly head and increase your negativity about people and events and ultimately colour how you are in life?

If you have come up with some issues from the above question, ask yourself the following - how is this past experience affecting how I am living my life? This may not be an easy question to answer. You may even find yourself wanting to side step it but it is a question worth posing none the less.

Remember your grievances are personal to you. No one else may know about them and you may not have shared them with anyone. Those who you come in contact with on a daily basis therefore are likely to be unaware of the grievances you carry around within you and the effect it may be having on your life.

Think about how aware are you of the effect your grievances are having on your life. *Remember that one of the heaviest things to carry in life is a grudge.* With that in mind do your grievances affect the decisions you make, the people you talk to, and ultimately the outcome you expect in everyday life? Remember the past has no power to stop you from being present and living your life fully. Only your grievances can do that.

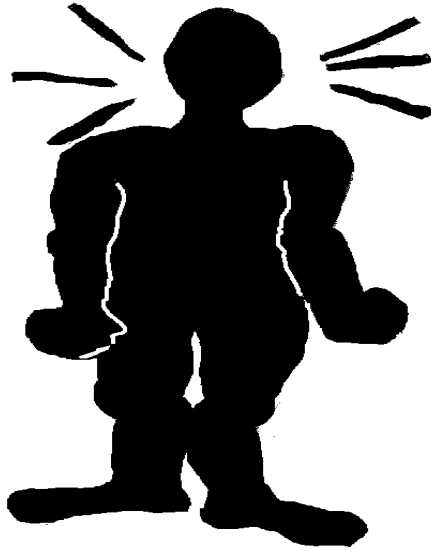
Are you left behind?

Have you ever wondered how people get left behind in life? Things move on but somehow some people and situations stay the same. Recently I read how someone described their life and their love of learning – “While I am learning I know that I am fully alive”. Learning in this sense not only meant from an academic point of view but also in terms of personal growth.

Disappointment may be felt by those who feel in some way hard done by in life. Two people may have had the same experience but handle it differently. One may be upset and put out by their experience but soon forget about it. The other person may be angry and frustrated both at the world and themselves. The difference is in the strength of their reaction to the situation and whether they moved on from it.

Think about any experience you may have had in the last few weeks that did not go according to plan. What was your reaction to it? Were you able to quickly deal with the situation and move on? Or are you still harbouring some negative energy from your experience? Is this a pattern in your life? If it is what effect is it having on you?

No one but you knows the answer the above questions, but think about it and honestly answer if your ‘personal baggage’ is holding you back from learning and being fully alive. If is not, take a bow and continue to embrace a full life as you are. However, if due to past disappointments and regrets you recognise yourself as trailing behind in life, you can still decide to be fully alive by learning from your past experiences and moving on.



**Anger is a an acid that can do more harm to the vessel
in which it stands than to anything
on which it is poured**

Anon

Enough to get your attention...?

A friend recently sent me this story

On a bright and sunny day, Ben was travelling through the country, feeling great in his new car. The world was at his feet as he clocked up the miles. As he reached the city his progress was halted as he had to manoeuvre his way through rush hour traffic. He began to get impatient at his slow progress and wondered if he would be late for his next appointment.

With his thoughts thus preoccupied his attention was drawn to his right where he thought he saw something moving very quickly. To his shock something hit the side door of his new car! He braked heavily and reversed to the spot from where he thought the item had been thrown. Suddenly Ben's day was turning into a nightmare as he jumped out of the car and the shouted at the nearest person "What was that all about and who are you?" The woman was apologetic, and said "I'm sorry but I didn't know what else to do, someone knocked down my dog and did not stop. I just wanted to get your attention as no one else would stop" Seeing how upset the woman was, immediately calmed Ben.

Thoughts of a scratch on his new car soon left him. He lifted the injured dog into his car and thankfully it was a happy ending. In the days that followed Ben considered getting the scratch fixed but decided against it. Instead he left it there to remind him not to go through life so fast without noticing what is really happening around him.

So what is the moral of the story? Think about it; what does someone have to do to get your attention? Do they have to say something a few times to get you to listen to them or does it have to be something very noticeable before you sit up and take heed? Only you know the answer to that question!

Negative Chatter

If someone talked to us like we often talk to ourselves, we would avoid further contact with that person. However, in our own internal thoughts we say negative things which quite often are not very complementary. When we continue to say things about ourselves that are not true we are creating the very reality that we do not want. Sometimes we even end up believing it!

Take for example a really busy day at work. There are many tasks to be completed but you cannot get round to them all. By evening do you find yourself saying, 'I should have done that better, or got more done...' or you might say "How stupid can I be to make that point at the meeting, I should have said ... instead"

We all have these negative thoughts going on. Do you really believe them? Would you allow a friend to talk to you in that way? Why not replace these old worn out patterns about yourself with those which will evoke more positive thoughts. "I was really busy at work today but got as much done as I could, "The next meeting that I attend I am going to ensure that I make that point".

So what is the difference? Instead of leaving work under a grey cloud of the 'what if', you may be able to leave all the negative thoughts behind. Pay attention to the phrases you use about yourself each day. Are you your own worst critic? Do the things you say affect you? If they have a negative effect, try changing what you say. In being kinder to yourself you can create a more positive outlook!

All I want you to do is LISTEN!

As you read the following please do so slowly. Think of its relevance for your own life and the people with whom you are in everyday conversation.

“When I ask you to listen and you start giving advice, you have not done what I have asked. When I ask you to listen to me and you begin to tell me why I should not feel that way, you are trampling on my feelings. When I ask you to listen and you feel that you have to do something to solve my problem, strange as it may seem you have failed me. LISTEN! All I asked was that you listen; not talk or do, I can do that for myself, just hear me and what I am saying.

I’m not helpless. I may be a little discouraged and faltering at the moment, but not helpless. When you do something for me that I can and need to do for myself, you contribute to my fear and feeling of inadequacy. When you accept as fact that I do feel what I feel, no matter how ridiculous and irrational it may seem to you, then I can stop trying to convince you. I can then go about the business of understanding just what it is that is behind this irrational feeling that I have. When that is clear to me, the answers are obvious and I don’t need advice – just someone to LISTEN to me”.

Anon.

If you have been on either end of the above situation the sentiments may be familiar to you. Think about listening when next in conversation with someone who needs your attention. Try to avoid being a rescuer and solving the person’s difficulties, just LISTEN and see the difference it will make.

Body Language

Have you ever thought about how your body language may dictate how you experience life? Are you someone who goes around with your shoulders forward and your head down? Or alternatively do you have a serious expression on your face ready to greet any bad news or indeed good news that the day brings?

Perhaps the following situations may throw further light on how your body language gives out signals; it may be difficult to persuade yourself or even someone else that you are happy if your chin is on your chest and your eyes cast downward. Alternatively, if you are very happy, walking tall with a smile on your face - try saying that you are very sad and unhappy. Hard to do isn't it!

It is surprising how many of us do not realise what signals we give out with our body language. If you or someone you know is doing their best not to look ahead of them what is it saying? This may be equally as true for those of us who keep a lid on our emotions with a very serious facial expression. Afraid to let our guard down in case we get more disappointed in life than we are already are.

The good thing about body language is that it can be changed and it's free to do it! Think about how you carry yourself and what expression you have on your face, then see does how you feel match it. If it does great, if not the choice is yours to change your body language in any way you want. You may be surprised at the difference walking tall, with a smile on your face, and looking life in the eye will make.

Try it and see!

Not just any talk is conversation

Have you ever had a conversation with someone and felt that it lifted you and had meaning? You may have been aware of the person really listening to you and meeting you where you were at while at the same time understanding you. This is indeed a powerful experience as can be seen in the following:

***Not just any talk is conversation
Not any talk raises consciousness
Good conversation has an edge
It opens your eyes to something
It quickens your ears***

***And good conversation reverberates
It keeps on talking in your mind later in the day
The next day, you find yourself still conversing
With what was said***

***The reverberation afterward is
the very raising of consciousness
Your mind and heart have been moved
You are at another level with your reflections***

James Hillman

Good conversation indeed can be all that the above talks about; it stays with you and can make you look at life differently. Flashes of the conversation may repeat themselves to you the next day as you look again for its meaning and significance for your life.

The question I would like to ask you today is – how long is it since you have had a meaningful conversation with someone? It can be a friend or family member or work colleague. A conversation where you took the time to really hear what the person is saying and responded to them in a meaningful way? If it has been a while since you have had such a conversation, why wait another day for something that will make a difference and will lift your spirits – why not start now?

Positive Energy

“In everyone’s life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle our inner spirit” Anon.

We are all familiar with the times when we felt down in the dumps and life seemed a hard uphill struggle. The world may have been grey around us and we struggled to be enthusiastic about the joys of life. Then you meet a friend or family member and all of a sudden you feel better. What is it about that person that helped you change your mood?

Whether we are aware of it or not we radiate negative or positive energy. You can’t see it but it can certainly be felt by those around you. An encounter with a person with negative energy may pull you down and make you feel that you want to quickly back away from them particularly if you don’t feel so good yourself. Alternatively you may welcome meeting someone who is positive, smiling not with a cheesy false grin but who is content and at peace with themselves. Somehow your inner spirit recognises these signals and wants to be the same. Suddenly things are not so grey anymore!

My question to you is, are you someone who radiates negative or positive energy? Perhaps you could spend some time thinking about this. In becoming more conscious of your inner spirit and energy perhaps you too could brighten the day of those around you.

What's your habit?

Ever notice how you do the same things over and over again even though you may not be happy with the outcome? Over the years you may have formed habits of how to respond to your own emotions but also how to respond to people and situations. Rick Carson in his well know book 'Taming Your Gremlin', writes about our inner gremlin and the part it plays in keeping our life in a small box. It may have the veil of keeping us safe and secure but ultimately our gremlin may squeeze all the life and joy out of us.

Gremlins come in positive and negative forms – the positive one encourages and supports you in what you do, the negative one (usually the loudest one!) puts doubts in your head as to your ability to handle situations and encourages you the stay just the way that you are. Habits are neither good nor bad but may be based on the world as you perceived it at some other time. They may be still suitable but may also be antiquated and outdated.

Habits can be beneficial if they are adopted willingly and do give a certain amount of security. However, your gremlin will sometimes convince you that operating out of habit is the best and only choice that you can make. Habits may then be cemented out of fear and fear is your gremlins primary tool. Consider this; as long as you operate out of habit, you will limit your ability to fully experience, appreciate and enjoy your life.

If you want to change some habit in your life, try not to swap one habit for another and don't beat yourself up about having to change. A new rule is no more than a new habit. Instead 'Taming Your Gremlin' encourages you to adopt a spirit of adventure towards your life, by simply noticing how your habits and your negative gremlins are getting in the way of you living your life to the full.



**You cannot prevent the birds of care and worry from
flying overhead, but you can stop them
building a nest in your head**

Chinese Proverb

What do our pets say about us?

Currently, or at some stage during your life you may have had the pleasure of owning a pet. It could have been a gold fish, hamster, cat or dog. Whatever kind of pet perhaps you could think for a few minutes about them and the difference they made to you life.

Was it a chore to look after them, making time for them when all else was done or was it a pleasure to sit down and look at your gold fish swimming in circles or your hamster sleeping soundly? If it was a cat or a dog did you take pleasure in their antics and wish your life could be as uncomplicated as theirs?

Wishful thinking says a lot about us, sometimes more than we think! Sometimes our body is sending out messages asking us to slow down and appreciate the things around us without complications just like our pets do. In the long run we may think that we are more intelligent and superior but who has the better lifestyle? OK, I know - who wants to be a hamster! However think about it! Sometimes our demands on ourselves are at odds with what we really want and long for.

So if you want to have a less complicated lifestyle perhaps you could start first at yourself and see what is in your life that is complicating it. Is it you or the people in it? The only person you have control of is yourself so think about what you need to do about it. To long for something such as peace of mind, contentment and fulfilment is a journey we all travel. Wherever we get our inspiration from be it a pet, people, books, experiences or situations in our lives the lesson is none the less important.

Attitude is everything!

You may have heard this old cliché before ‘attitude is everything’. Take a few minutes with me and think what does it really mean? Each one of us has a unique attitude; good or bad, it makes us what we are. Not only does it make us what we are, it also influences how we see and do things. Would you say that you were a negative or positive person? Or a mixture of both? Do you find sometimes that your thoughts get the better of you and influence how you feel about a situation even before it has happened?

If you are one of the many people who see the bad before the good, stop and think! How could this situation be different, how could YOU be different? If you can understand your thoughts you may be able to change them. You have the ability to choose how you respond to any given situation. The way you are today does not mean you have to stay that way forever. Our lives are a result of decisions we have made in the past. If you do not like how you see your life, you have the power to change it and how you are going to be in the future. You choose how you react in every situation, the only person who makes you the person you are, is YOU.

Stop and think before you give a response to any situation. If you feel negative thoughts coming on replace them with something good, something that will not bring you down. Try to do this a few times everyday and you will be surprised at the effect it will have on your attitude. You may even see possibilities in old situations, because YOU and not the situation will be different and that will make all the difference.

Positively Successful

Positive people are great to be around; they have a sparkle about them that just makes a difference as to how they are. So are they born positive, do they decide to be positive or is there a secret formula for developing such an attitude?

A positive person takes responsibility for their own lives. They take the rough with the smooth. Yes, they have down days but they do not let such days define them. They do not let themselves be set back by difficulties they encounter. Such thinking is a choice. You and I can make that choice right now. Sounds a bit scary doesn't it!

Once we make that choice no more can we blame others for our disappointments as we are taking responsibility for our own actions. No more whinging! - Now there's a thought! When faced with a difficult situation instead of saying "this is just typical, things always go against me" make an effort to think positively. "How can I get the best out of this situation that is not entirely as I would like it to be" - what difference this can make to the outcome.

A life lived with intent produces that which is intended. If you make no choices in life you will get unintended results. The following are some tips on how you can be more positive in your outlook and succeed in whatever you do:

Set a goal for yourself. If the thought of this puts you off start by making small ones and then build on it. Then consider your attitude, do you expect the best or worst in a situation? A positive attitude attracts positive solutions. You may be surprised but what you expect usually happens! Persistence, don't give up too easily, if at first you do not succeed try again. Start today with a belief in your own power to have the kind of life you really want. Try to take some time out, every so often take stock of where you are in life. Adjust your plan if needs be but take credit for all your hard work. So do you have what it takes to succeed? The choice is yours!

What are you afraid of?

As we go through life we all have fears and anxieties. Some of our fears can be about external issues which may range from being afraid of spiders, to meeting new people. What about fears that no one else sees, what you really afraid of? In order to live life fully in our fast moving world, it is now more important than ever to break the pattern of negative thinking so that our fears do not become a reality.

We may need to acknowledge these fears and move on regardless. Have you had thoughts like the following: ‘well I can’t do that because,’ ‘I was never any good at ...’ ‘I would like to but....’ How will you know if you have never tried? Is now a good time to break that mould?

It is ok to be afraid, but if it is inhibiting your lifestyle try looking at the reasons for your fear. In every decision there are downsides, there is no such thing as the perfect answer. You make decisions on the basis of information that you have at the time. So give yourself a break - Are you replaying in your head some old worn out tape about your belief in yourself or others. Is it preventing you from moving on with your life?

During various times of the year perhaps you may want to do an evening class or join a particular organisation. If you cannot get someone to go with you, why not consider going alone. What is the worst thing that can happen? People may ignore you or make you welcome. Their response will be a result of how they are themselves and may not necessarily be a value judgement about you. They too may have anxieties about the situation for themselves. Reach out and be how you would like others to be with you. By reframing the emphasis away from you and your old negative thoughts about situations you may be surprised to see that your fears may not have been justified.

All I want for Christmas

What would you really like to have for Christmas? Give yourself a minute to think about it. What would lift your spirits and really mean something to you? Would that something be an 'object' or would it be a feeling?

Many people have so much material goods today that we do not have to wait until Christmas to get what we want; but what do we really need in life to be happy? It is all a matter of choice; we can choose to think that we have all we need and be happy or we can think that the field is always greener on the other side. Life throws a lot at us and it is our reaction to it that makes us the people that we are, therefore our lives are a result of the choices we have made in the past. You cannot change the past but you can change how you are in the future.

If the consumerism of Christmas gives you an uneasy feeling, give yourself the best present of all - take some time out for yourself to reflect on how far you have moved forward in your life since last year. Are you still hanging on to old hurts and grudges or have you moved on and lived a more fulfilled and balanced life? If you are still in the same rut as last year look at what you need to change (yes, it is possible to change!). When your subconscious is convinced that the goal is certain, it will provide the ways and means of fulfilling or achieving that goal. Bridge the gap from where you are to where you want to be and live life to its fullest. Live in the moment and appreciate where you are right now with all that you have.

Why not make a choice for yourself now and decide that during any Christmas and New Year you will be true to yourself. A wise person once said – *“If you are grateful for what you already have, the world will conspire to give you more to be grateful for. If you are resentful of what you already have, the world will conspire to give you more to resentment.”* Thought provoking words!

Is it worth your anger?

Being angry happens to all of us, and can help to let off steam and tension building up inside us. Do you have a short fuse and are given to angry outbursts when things do not go your way? Or are you more of a slow burner with resentment and anger slowly building up inside until you finally give way to your anger? Whatever way you are what is the end cost to you and those around you?

Getting angry with someone is allowing them to control you. In losing control we are giving away our power to them. The problem with getting angry is that there are no winners and only a slim chance that it might solve the problem. There is however a much greater chance that it will create new problems for you.

By all means stand up for yourself in a given situation where you feel wronged. However, don't give away your power to someone in an angry conversation and then regret it later. You may need to ask yourself if there are particular situations in your life that you always feel resentment and anger towards. Perhaps the responsibility may be yours for creating the situation. Did you ever think the difficulty may be you?

The value of a smile!

Have you become a very serious person? Do you remember the last time that you smiled at a stranger in the street? Held back a door in a shop or building and smiled at the person coming through? If smiling is low on your list of priorities, then think again of the value of a smile whether you are the giver or receiver.

In the face of adversity a smile can put someone at ease, and means that you are on their side. It can be a calming influence when everyone around you is losing their heads. A smile can be a welcoming presence in a crowded room when someone is trying to find you. It can help to build bridges when you can feel negative energy coming from someone.

If you are feeling miserable and do not want the world to know, a smile can cover a million feelings. So if it can do that for you imagine what it can do for someone who meets you with a smile on your face? A smile gives out positive energy, and as a result attracts positive energy also. If you give away your smile it will generally come back to you. No one wants to meet someone with a cheesy grin all the time but someone with a genuine smile can be great to lift your spirits.

So if you find yourself down at heart, with life weighing you down, acknowledge your feelings but try this FREE and effective way of dealing with it. It may not be easy at first but as you practice it, smiling will become second nature to you. If you were to talk to someone with frown lines and a serious expression or someone with a smile on their face which one would you pick? I know which one I would choose!

Feeling the strain?

Have you ever woken up in the middle of the night and snapped awake immediately? Perhaps you were concerned about some issue during the day about work or home and it was still on your mind at night? Sound familiar? It may be reasonable in the short term if you are concerned about some issue to feel like this but if it is happening on a frequent basis you may need to take steps to redress it.

Being positive does not mean always looking on the bright side and pushing any negativity or worry away. It is about accepting and looking realistically at life and working out ways to deal with negativity when it arises. The more time you give thinking about something, the more fears may start to creep in and derail you. Negative thoughts have a habit of becoming more frequent when you doubt your own ability to handle situations. If you are worried about something instead of skirting around the issue your best option may be to face it head on. Be realistic and decide whether or not there is anything you can do to address the situation. Give yourself a time frame and if you feel you have done your best after this time then move on with no regrets. It's a tall order I know but one which will free you from people and situations which drag you down.

Worry or negative thoughts affects us at all levels in our life and sometimes other people unload their worries onto us because they do not want to deal with them. If you are worrying about situations and people that are beyond your control, you may need to do a reality check. In rescuing them you are not only increasing your own worry but also supporting and enabling their worry.

People who appear to have no worries probably have some but the difference is they have learned to deal with them in a positive way and move on. There is a time for worry in life and a time for action. If you spend more time in action than in worrying you will be surprised at the difference it will make!

Listen – You may be surprised what you will hear!

We all like to be listened to, be it re-telling a story or experience or telling a joke. It is good to be heard and understood. Perhaps you know someone who is a good listener or maybe you have had it said about you. What a great compliment! Even though we like being listened to, many of us are not good at listening. There may be times for all of us when we are so eager to put our side of the story across that we can't hear what others are saying.

Why not try an experiment with me! Cast your mind back to a recent conversation you had. Think about the times that you interrupted; the times when you tried to control the conversation to get round to what you wanted to talk about; and the times when you just tuned out and let your mind wander. Not very nice when you think about it is it?

Why not try a different approach. When next in conversation refrain from the need to comment and focus entirely on what you are hearing. Become fully present so that the speaker knows that they are your focus. Keep eye contact and an appropriate expression. Your primary focus is on what is being said rather than what you want to say. Release yourself from the need to comment, so that you can focus entirely on what you are hearing. Let the speaker know you are listening by not interrupting to say something, but keeping your focus on them and confirm what is being said to you. The speaker may only want to be heard and is not looking for answers so there is no need to feel you must have the perfect response. At the end of the day we all just want to be heard and understood and really listening to someone else is the first step towards it.

Who are you like?

Celebrity culture may dictate a ‘cool’ look. It’s put forward as something for people to aspire to and imitate. Have you ever noticed though how sometimes we can often lose our individuality trying to be like someone else? Think about that for a minute.

If you had a chance, who would you like to be – yourself or someone else? Let’s face it; there are things that we all like about ourselves and other things and issues that we would like to change. However, why not consider looking in the mirror and seeing someone you like and admire?

Some people who read this page may like what they see when they look in the mirror - others may not. For those of you who don’t like what you see - what is it about yourself that you do not like – is it a physical feature or is it some aspect of your character that you would prefer to forget? The funny thing about life is that all of us have dark sides and parts of us that we do not like. Focusing on these areas only makes their importance bigger and enables them to have a more negative impact on our lives. No one is perfect and you are not like anyone else, you are just you, doing your best each day. You are much bigger than your faults and dark sides

So when looking in the mirror if you are not happy with what you see try instead to turn the tables and see someone who you admire, who is their own person, who is trying hard to live a full life. Now focus on the things about yourself that you like. My guess would be that you are all that you need to be right now and that you have all the things that you need. So who are you like? You are you, not like anyone else, but with your own place in the world with a unique contribution to make.



**The middle of the road is where the white line is, and
that's the worst place to drive.**

Robert Frost

What's the use of worrying?

*My life has been filled with miseries and failures,
most of which never happened.*

These are the words of a wise person who recognised that time spent in apprehension was mostly time that was not well used. We all worry from time to time about various things in life. It could be about your own or someone else's health, your financial situation or some other personal issue. In a sense worry is over thinking about all the things that could go wrong in any given situation and how we would deal with it if it actually did happen. A little worry is fine but it is when we use it as a crutch for inaction or if it holds us back from living life fully then it becomes more important that we do something about this negative habit. In worrying, one negative thought leads to another and then to another and all too easily it goes into a spiral of habit which is hard to break.

Those who worry on a constant basis (whether or not they are aware of it) may find that they get a certain amount of comfort from it. Encouragement from others to change their 'worry ways' makes very little difference to them. It is almost as if it is easier to stay the same than change. However, habits such as worrying can be changed if we want to change them. The secret to changing them is to become more aware of when they are happening. In arresting the spiral of worry at an early stage you need to ask yourself the question – what is the likelihood of that very negative outcome actually happening? Realistically answer this question. If you can honestly say that this outcome will happen make a Plan B as to how you will deal with it. My guess is though that there will be no need to make that plan!

So instead of getting into the worry spiral, become more aware of what is the reality of your situation. Yes, things may go wrong but they may also go right. Try to spend more time imagining this positive outcome than the negative one. The effect of this will put you in a more positive frame of mind. So as the song goes 'what's the use of worrying..... !

How do you make other people feel?

Do you remember a situation in your life when someone made you feel small and insignificant, as if you did not matter? Passed you by when you said 'hello' or ignored a contribution that you made to a conversation. Not a very nice feeling is it! You may have been left annoyed and maybe even resentful about it. Alternatively, you may be the person who at different times in your life saw a look of hurt on another persons face but did not stop to consider what it meant. Instead you continued on your way as if nothing had happened.

Notwithstanding the above, each of us individually must accept some responsibility for allowing others influence the way we feel about ourselves and how sometimes (or even a lot of the time!) we let other people's values affect us. Either way at the end of the day, that internal feeling of hurt or anxiety may still be there and must be acknowledged. How could this be different for you?

Try doing this simple exercise – at the start of your day think about those you will come in contact with. From the moment you leave your house, acknowledge everything from the weather to the people you meet. Try not to look away from those who greet you but smile to show that you value the exchange between you. Even if you are involved in the briefest conversation remember too to listen and acknowledge the contribution of others.

If for some reason or another you feel unable to try the above, it may be best not to focus on it. Instead think about how you would like others to feel having encountered you. This takes the emphasis away from you and moves it onto the other person. At the end of the day look back over it and see what you have gained from it. Chances are it will be quite a lot and you can rest easy in the knowledge that you helped others feel valued – now how does that make you feel?

Inner peace and contentment

There are many different kinds of peace but lets take it at the moment that that I am talking about inner peace and contentment that everyone wants and needs in one form or another.

Did you ever have a nagging feeling that all is not right, that you should be doing more with you life and have a feeling that life is just not exciting enough for you? You may be easily bored and are always looking for something new to take your attention but somehow once the novelty has worn away you get bored too with this new idea – sound familiar? Sometimes though in looking at outside things and events to give us inner peace we are looking in the wrong direction. The first place to start may be at home in our own lives and in the lives of those who are nearest and dearest to us. Life can be really busy and may be fraught with stress and tension. It may be a good idea to really look at ourselves first to see do we really need to keep busy all the time. If you SLOW DOWN your mind and sit with your life for a while you may be surprised at what you see. Yes, you may have an uneasy feeling at first but don't shy away from it. Sit with it for a while and try to decide do you like what you see. Don't be too critical; just accept yourself for who you are, doing your best in life.

Your journey into inner peace may be taking one step forward today and two steps backwards tomorrow. However, what matters is that you are taking conscious steps regardless of what direction you are going. Only you will know how important or how big the steps are and what will lead to your inner peace and contentment. Your journey may be a long or a short one, either way it is individual to you. You may find that inner peace can be gained not by doing great or wonderful things with your life but by accepting and liking yourself as you are. Now there is food for thought!

What colour are you inside?

If you were asked to describe what colour you are inside, what would that colour be? Would it be a nice happy bright colour like yellow or pink or would it be dark and grey like rain clouds? Think about that for a minute.

Many of us have never thought about what colour we are inside but it does affect how we portray ourselves and inevitably affects those we come in contact with everyday. Our thoughts and feelings affect how we react to other people who are unaware of how we are feeling. For example if you are feeling a bright red inside (normally used to describe anger!), it is very difficult to react as if you were feeling a very relaxed and happy mellow yellow. So sometimes there is a clash of colours so to speak! Another example may be if someone asks you a simple question and you give an angry response. This may leave the other person wondering what on earth is the matter with you as you look happy enough on the outside. Sound familiar?

Yes, there are days when all of us feel a bit grey inside and indeed a bit red from time to time. The important thing is though that you do not define yourself by these passing colours. Instead, try to choose a colour you would rather be and work towards achieving this colour on a more permanent basis. At the start if you are feeling very grey or indeed blue you may only achieve a contented and happy bright yellow or pink for only part of the day or week. However, the more conscious you are of your internal colour the more real you will be to yourself and those you come in contact with. Suddenly the world will seem a brighter place and with it will come a change of colour. Only you can feel that colour you are inside now and only you can make a decision to change it even in a small way. So to enhance your life today what colour are you?

Take that look off your face.....

The above line is borrowed from a well know song indicating that without saying a word messages can be conveyed to those around us that expresses a thousand words. With this in mind if you looked in the mirror today, what message are you sending out to those around you? All of us from time to time have seen our reflection in shop windows and wondered - do we really look like that? While such images may distort how we look it does have an underlying grain of truth. Think about the following, - do you walk along with your head down or is your mind in a far away place concerned about something in particular? Does your expression say that you are indifferent to those around you or do you make a real effort for positive eye contact?

While acknowledging that our outside image may only portray a small percentage of how we feel (the tip of the iceberg so to speak!), why not think about the impression you give to people at home, at work or indeed as you go shopping. Is it a friendly open expression? Or are you oblivious to those you meet and even though you may be feeling ok you somehow don't convey this to those you come in contact with. Whatever 'look' you have on your face think about the message you are conveying. There may be days when you want to have a neutral expression but there may also be days when you catch yourself in the mirror or shop window with a positive expression. So practice your different looks and see if it makes any difference – remember of all the things you wear your expression may be the most important!

Intuition

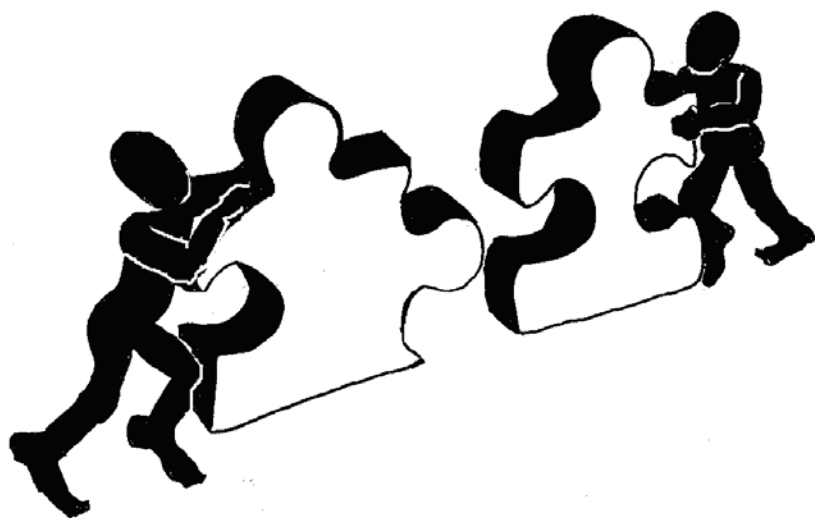
Have you ever heard of someone listening to their intuition? Perhaps you do it yourself? If so, perhaps you are aware of trusting yourself to make the best decisions for you and your loved ones. Some people, however, are slow to trust their intuition. In doing this they seek out other peoples opinions and sometimes follow a path that may not be right for them. Do you recognise anyone like this?

Relying on ourselves to make a decision can be a scary thought. If you are slow to make decisions and trust yourself perhaps you may need to ask yourself why you are like this. Is it as a result of making bad decisions in the past or perhaps you think if you follow X's advice you will get better results than if you made the decision yourself?

Having the self confidence to trust yourself and follow your own intuition takes practice. Yes, it is easier to follow someone else's path. However, you may not get the same level of satisfaction if you take the easy option than if you were to listen to and trust yourself that you know what is right for you.

So what is your intuition saying to you today about your life and the circumstances you find yourself in? What do you need to do to believe that decisions based on your intuition are just as good as anyone else?

Work Life Balance



What is life balance for you?

Many people ask if it is possible to achieve balance in life? In this there may be confusion about the need to divide your life between neat segments i.e. 40% family, 40% work, 5% Social Life and Friends etc..... However, life balance is not about dividing your time straight down the line. Instead it is about working towards whatever balance is right for you on any particular day, at any particular point in your life.

As you read this perhaps you are unemployed and think this balance idea is not for you. If anything you may feel that you have too much time on your hands. Consider this though you may be unemployed but what are the times in your life that you enjoy and look forward to? It does not necessarily have to involve money but whether or not you are in paid work we all need and deserve a balanced life. This enables us to make the most of every day and be able to meet any challenges that come our way.

So what is life balance for you – it is a time when you felt in the ‘zone’ where life is good and you are in control. Thoughts about creating it only get you so far. Taking steps to achieve it will get you there in a way that suits – why not try to take the first step today? Knowing and feeling what is right for you may take a bit of effort but creating balance is possible whatever your situation in life. If you get that feeling even once it is possible to recreate it again in the future. Second and subsequent times are easier as now you know what you are looking for!

Listen to your heart

Ever feel as if your life is out of sync? Like there is just something wrong but you can't put your finger on it? If you do, try to slow down and listen to what your heart and not what your head is saying to you.

If you feel that life is all about doing things faster be it at work or home – you may feel pulled in a lot of directions. As our lives speed up, so may the longing for stillness become acute. If you feel like this - there is nothing wrong with you – your body is simply saying – “STOP – I need to take a little time out here”

When we look after ourselves we feel at one with the world and have a sense of well being. If we ignore the signs, the consequences may not be obvious immediately but it may catch up with us in the long run.

To look after ourselves takes just a small amount of effort – make time for a walk or a cosy chat with a friend. Leave aside demands of family and work and send a message to your body that you are putting yourself first. You just might find the answers that you were looking for were right in front of you, but you were just too busy to see.

How is your time management?

I am sure you have often heard someone say that they are not good time managers. Does this mean that it takes them longer to do things than everyone else or is it that they are disorganised? Whatever the reason for you or anyone else saying this, even if you feel that time is not your friend it is always possible to change your time management attitude. Ultimately a change in attitude will lead to improved results. Many of us are inclined to waste valuable time with unimportant things. You may be very busy, rush from one thing to another but your output may not match your busyness! Think back over the last few days, what exactly were you trying to achieve and did it happen?

In order to be a more effective time manager the following tips may help you; Think ahead and plan what you really need to do. Compare this with what is possible for you to do. Quite often many of us take on too much and then are cross with ourselves when we cannot complete tasks. Even small things done well will boost your morale and encourage you to take on bigger things. In addition, try to do one thing at a time and tackle high priority tasks first and complete these before you move on. It is not uncommon to hear people say they have a few things half done and nothing finished. What would it take for you to finish one thing before you move onto then next? Think about that for a minute.

Why not consider doing the following exercise. Look at the next few days and think by the weekend (or any day that suits you) if you really had the time what would you like to achieve? Now consider that you actually DO have that time and make a definite plan to achieve what ever it is you are thinking about. Overall good time management is not a mystery. Instead it is about doing some simple things well. This will give you motivation and encouragement to complete more demanding tasks as they arise. You will be surprised at the difference simple things will make to you and your time management!

Balance in a tilted world

Balance in life is different for everyone. What looks like a balanced life to one person may differ for another because we all have different goals, values and definitions of success. Real balance comes when you're doing what you want and need to do when it needs to be done. It is about doing what is important at the time.

So how do you recognise if there is an imbalance in your life? Consider the following:

- Do you have a sense that there is not enough time to do everything that you need to do in a day?
- Experience burnout, low productivity and stress related illness?

You may be able to recognise yourself or someone you know in the above. So how do you get some balance back in your life? Don't despair as it is possible to achieve it. Why not try out the following exercise - sit down for 10 minutes in a quiet place and think about how things are going in your life. Concentrate on the things that are going well, that make you feel happy and content. Think of the times when you feel in harmony with yourself and not pulled in many directions. This is the zone of balance! It may not be possible to live in this place but you do need to visit it from time to time. Life comes along and throws us off centre and our world somehow gets tilted. It is what we do when that happens that is important.

Creating balance in your life is essential if you want to live a healthy, happy and enriched life. Remember your life today is a result of choices you have made in the past – so you are the one in control. You have the ability to recognise what is needed to make those decisions and have the kind of life that you want and deserve.

Spend some time alone each day

Are you surrounded by work colleagues, family or friends each day? If so when do you get the opportunity to be alone with your own thoughts? Those we come in contact with make many demands on us for our attention. Even simple things like being out walking can be interrupted by our mobile phone so is there ever a time when you are alone with your thoughts? At times it is good to spend some time on your own just to be you, nothing else, just being yourself.

So why would you spend time on your own? It may help you to 'recharge your batteries' so to speak and get back some of that which has been taken from you during the day. Much of our life now involves activity so just by staying still may also help to reduce your stress levels. Perhaps you fill your days with things so that you do not have to think? Spending time alone each day may not be as bad as you think and the stillness may help you discover too what you really want in life.

So what would you do while you are alone? (Try to avoid TV, you can do that anytime, and definitely switch off your mobile phone!) You could walk, read, listen to music or just listen to the silence or just look out the window and daydream. Take a minute to think about it now – sounds nice doesn't it! No noise, no interruptions, just you, being you. If you think spending time alone each day is too much to ask why not try just once a week to start and then increase it when you can. Don't put off doing it until you can find the perfect time – that may never come. Decide to start today and see how you get on.

Time to do what you want to do

Putting our clocks forward and back during the year marks the beginning and end of passing seasons. During this time we may momentarily miss the loss or gain of that hour. However, have you ever felt like you are losing time every day? I am sure you have heard people say “I don’t know where the time goes!” The topic of time or the lack of it is a recurring theme for many of us. We have so many time saving machines but yet we have less time than before.

Consider the following; How many times do you go to bed at night tired from your day and feel that you have not done enough? Feel dissatisfied and beat yourself up a bit? Why not try an alternative – look back on your day and see what you were happy with, and what you could have done without. Ask yourself what percentage of your time do you spend doing things you don’t enjoy or even dread? Is there anything you can do about it? If your time is drained by commitments which you have no interest in or which take a lot of personal energy from you, think of ways to eliminate or at the very least half them. Is this something which you alone can do, or if not could you delegate or pay others to do it for you? Could you be really brave and just stop doing it? You may be surprised at the positive effect it will have on the rest of your life.

Imagine what it would be like to look back over your day and feel happy with it! It may not be possible to do it all the time but the more you eliminate time and energy draining issues the more time there will be for the things that are important to you.

Feeling Stressed?

Stress can be caused by a number of factors; work, family, relationships, money worries, illness, etc. Intense feelings and stressful thoughts may come out of nowhere. Anger, despair, loneliness and bitterness are all gremlins that may rear its head when you least expect it. Stress may cause you to breathe differently, taking a short sharp intake instead of breathing fully. It is easy to get caught up in the spiral of everyday life and forget to look after yourself! It may be helpful to evaluate your life as it is now – take a moment to examine what may be causing you stress. You may need to create some stress busting techniques like the following;

- Take five minutes to think happy thoughts during the day. Life has become very serious – think of your favourite joke! It is important to unwind and let your mind rest from the constant traffic of your negative emotions as you go through your day
- Take time for yourself – get some exercise. Research has shown that physical exercise is an excellent stress reliever. It not only improves your health and reduces stress but it will also relax tense muscles and help you sleep.
- Set realistic limits as to how much commitment you can give to different areas of your life. When it comes to work and family there are only so many hours in the day. Set these limits with yourself and others. Don't be afraid to say NO to a request for your time and energy if you have not got it.

You may not always be able to eliminate stress, but it is possible to control your reaction to it. Don't be stressed out by people or circumstances that are beyond your control. Think about your breathing, slow it down – you may be surprised at the difference it will make!

**Remember the happiness of your life depends on
the quality of your thoughts**

Anon

Are you a perfectionist?

Sometimes by being a perfectionist you may end up being your own worst enemy! There will always be times when we fall prey to negative emotions – when we beat ourselves up over something and find it hard to let go of those feelings. If this happens on a regular basis you may need to look at your own personal traits, so as you read this why not consider if you are a perfectionist? Only happy when things are just right and if not you get frustrated and your stress level increases? If you can recognise yourself in the above the following may help alleviate some of your stress:

- Take advantage of what **today** brings. The housework does not always have to be done on a particular day or time – why not take advantage of a beautiful day and get some fresh air. If you do not get all your usual tasks done today - there is always tomorrow!
- Practise **“letting go”** The less you feel that you need to control your life the more stress you can remove. If you are a perfectionist this may not be easy initially but with practice it should get easier. Start by giving yourself some personal space and ‘me time’ and gradually work your way towards being more relaxed.
- Instead of demanding perfectionism from yourself and others focus your energy in **another more productive direction** and leave well enough alone. If something can be considered ‘good enough’ without the need to be perfect - let it be. This strategy will help to remove pressure from you and lower your overall stress level throughout your life.

Once you have completed your daily tasks be it at home or work – let them go – be forgiving of others and yourself. Put it behind you and move on. If it is not 100% perfect and up to your usual standard of work does it really matter?

What are you worried about?

We are all familiar with people who worry about things and may even be a worrier ourselves. If you are a worrier you may find a certain comfort in worrying about yourself or your loved ones. In thinking about various situations or people there may be a certain familiarity about it. However, if you find you are increasing your negative thought patterns about yourself and others, to get a more balanced life you may need to find other ways of expressing your concerns.

More often than not the ‘what if’s’ of life do not happen be they in work or in our personal lives. Yet, as you consider your feelings about a particular situation you may find yourself in a negative spiral. Somehow you are drawn like a moth to a light bulb knowing it will not be in your best interest but somehow feeling that you cannot stop yourself. The real difficulty may come when your negative thoughts completely take over with little room for positive input. Do you recognise yourself or perhaps even a friend or work colleague in this?

Yes, there may be times when it is reasonable to be concerned about some issue in your life. It may be it a health issue or perhaps you were concerned about someone else. However, try to think of any time in your life where needless worry ever achieved anything. In thinking about this, ask yourself the questions “Am I a worrier?” and “if I am what effect is it having on my life?”

We all need to accept ourselves ‘warts and all’. However, if you have a pattern of worrying about consequences instead of ‘doing’ you may be standing in your own way of having the kind of life that you want and deserve

Who do you take on holidays?

For your holidays you may decide to either stay at home or go abroad, but whatever your choice of destination we all need to enjoy some down time away from our everyday routine. Today, I would like to ask you – who do you take on holiday with you? Not who are the people you take on holiday with you - but this is about you. Is it a discontented *you* or a nothing will please me *you*, or a this holidays is going to solve all my problems *you*? Or perhaps in recent months you have not even thought about who you are and where you see your life going?

The funny thing is whatever kind of person you are going on holiday; essentially you come back the same person. You may be a bit more rested and relaxed but as soon as you step back into your daily routine things usually are the same as they were before you left! How could this be different? Do you put things off and hope that you some day will get round to them or do you seize the moment and live every day as best you can?

Perhaps a first step would be to take a good hard look at your life as it is today and see how you view it. Is your view of work or your personal life colouring how you see things? if it does not and you happy with how your life is - well done! However, if the grass is always greener on the other side and you are discontented and restless, what are you willing to do about it?

To live a full and balanced life takes focus, time, and energy. However, the satisfaction of living everyday will reward you greatly. Consider making the following goal - by the time you go on holiday next year to be able to look in the mirror and see a person who is fully alive and embracing life every day of the year. Interested? Why not take a first step and see what happens. You may find that instead of being an oasis in the middle of a mediocre year your next holiday will be an added bonus.

You are in control

Have you noticed what happens when someone says something that might upset your day? Suddenly everything is out of focus and you are at odds with the world and yourself. Have you ever asked yourself – who is control here?

When your day, be it at work or home, is going astray and turning out very different than you expected, try letting it go and see what happens. If someone in particular is playing their part to upset you – try not to react to them and their negative energy. Try not to replay scenes from similar days in your head – instead replace it with thoughts that you have never lived this day before so embrace it and see what happens. It may take some courage and determination but can it be worse than feeling that other people are dictating how you should feel? Other people's opinions are just that - their thoughts, their ideas. Sometimes that's helpful, but not always. Focus on yourself and what a particular situation means for you.

Remember you have choices. You can now choose how you are going to be today and in the future. Each day and situation in your life is different but what is important is the choice you make – that one is up to you.



**A journey of a thousand miles begins
with a single step**

Anon

Who do you trust to do a good job?

Ever needed something done and you put off asking someone as you don't trust them to do as good a job as you? Perhaps you are a perfectionist, or indeed superwoman (or man!) and can manage all things yourself? You may be used to taking the load of housework at home or indeed tasks at work. Take a few minutes today to think about how you delegate. Whatever kind of person you are, ask yourself the question - do you really have to take everything on board yourself or could you share around some of the work ?

It would be great if everyone could do things the same way as you do but fortunately life is not like that as we all have different skills and abilities. Yours may be that you have great attention to detail or perhaps you take a more balanced all round approach. On the other hand those you live or work with may not be the same. Whatever way they are it may be useful once in a while to ask them to do something for you and then stand back and let it happen. Don't hover to see how things are going instead retreat without comment and whatever way it turns out thank them for their contribution.

If you find it hard to let go, practice the above for a few times and see the difference it will make to lessen your own workload. Keeping in mind that you do not have to be all things to everyone will not only benefit you but may also enable others to feel valued.. That can only be a positive experience for them too.

Time to acknowledge your happiness?

Recently I read about Paul who was going about his everyday life and was very busy with work, family and friends. Somehow his life was on the fast forward button and one day lead into another. Until one day Paul asked himself the question “Am I happy and content?” To his surprise he was able to answer - YES!. Why surprise you might think? Well while he was so busy ‘living’ he never stopped to think that maybe things were going ok after all.

Looking back in hindsight he could see that yes overall he was happy but he never showed it much on the outside. As he always seemed to be going ‘somewhere’ he did not smile too much or stop to talk to someone in the street or in his neighbourhood. Overall all Paul took life seriously. So he decided instead of being serious he would try to balance it with some lighter moments. He smiled and laughed more. Was more open to social conversation with those he came in contact with both at home and at work. Somehow he was not so focused on ‘living’.

So what do you think the end result was? Yes, you guessed it – Paul was even happier than ever! He took the focus from himself and shared his happiness with others and what a difference it made for all those who came in contact with him. By sharing his happiness he too received much more in return. So why don’t you like Paul ask yourself the question – Am I happy? See what answers you come up with - you may be surprised at the difference it too will make to your life.

Failure or success? - Don't give up!

A wise person once said “you always pass failure on the way to success”. How true it is! In today’s celebrity culture you would be forgiven for thinking that success comes overnight. Somehow you too may be getting the message that you are only worthwhile when you are successful and feel that your path through life should be smooth, viewing anything that distracts you as a failure.

However, for want of a better word – ‘failure’ has its uses and should not be side stepped too quickly. Sometimes if we stay in that space for a while and not rush headlong ahead it will make our journey from there on much smoother. So if you did not achieve what you wanted in the first attempt, don’t give up. Take some time to re-consider your options and try not to let it reflect how you feel about yourself. You are a good and worthwhile person whatever happens. Sure enough at times you may be disappointed if you did not reach your goal. However, try not to forget what you learned in striving towards it. If you slip back a bit that is ok too, the main thing is DON’T GIVE UP!

So what area in your life are you particularly happy about? Now think about areas that give you the most concern? Why not decide to do something about these and see what happens. Either way you will come out on top as there are lessons to be learned along the way. Your journey towards success will have made all the difference and is something unique to you. Remember there is no such thing as failure only success.

How do you measure your life?

Do you ever wonder what life is all about? Is it about getting through each day as best you can or is it about putting your head down and hoping you do ok? Pause for a minute and think about your own unique life and how you live it. . Now consider the following saying I recently read:

“Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take but by the moments that take our breath away”

So in thinking about your life have you had any moments that have taken your breath away? Was that special moment caused by beautiful scenery, a sunset, a flower or a special song or poem? These are moments that make you smile and feel wow it's good to be alive and experiencing this! Were these moments at work or at home? If you are having difficulty in calling to mind such a memory perhaps you are trying too hard to remember, let the thought go for a few minutes and then come back to it.

Some of you may think that you have not had any moments yet in your life that are special. Consider this though perhaps these moments are all around, if only you were open to see them. It's not going to be something complicated or hidden or for someone who is young or old enough to see it. These moments are for everyone and you will see and hear them when you are open and want to see them. You may find that these are the times when you are unexpectedly and pleasantly surprised by what you see and hear. Somehow though these times lift our spirits and give meaning to our lives. Try too hard to find them and they will elude you but sit back and be relaxed and open and you will find that they are all around you. The difference will be that you are open to finding meaning and fulfilment even in the smallest things in your life and that can bring surprising results!

Motivation at work

Work takes up a large proportion of our life and if you lack motivation while there you may need to look at where it is coming from. If you feel undervalued, bored or stuck in a rut, do you need to think about changing jobs or changing the way you think about the one you have? If you have found yourself in this situation in the past (or are in it at the moment) it may be that not only have you changed but also the situation as well. There may be new procedures that you do not like, or a new boss. Perhaps you did not get that promotion you were working towards or a sufficient pay rise. Whatever the reason your motivation may be waning. So what is your next step?

Try not to give into the situation and go on automatic pilot when you reach work. Resist living for the time when you are free in the evenings and on days off. Life is too short to live in the future. To get out of a rut there is no point in jumping to another job and finding yourself in the same situation again, instead you may need to put a plan in place. So sorry, no quick magic solutions here!

Take stock of where you are going with your career and decide what you are going to do about it. The following quotation from Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland" may give you food for thought "*One day Alice came to a fork in the road and saw a cat sitting in a tree. "Which road will I take?" she asked. In response the cat said "where do you want to go?" "I don't know" Alice answered. "Then" said the cat "it doesn't matter"*

So like Alice unless you know where you are going, the road you take will not matter. However, by making choices as to your end goal, the road you take will make all the difference. Plan where you see yourself in five years time. It may even be in the same job or a similar one as you are in now. The difference is that you are taking control of where you are going and what you want from your life.

Life is no straight and easy corridor

*Life is no straight and easy corridor
along which we travel free and unhampered,
but a maze of passages through which we must seek our way,
lost and confused now and again in a blind alley.*

*But always, if we have faith,
a door will open for us,
not perhaps one that we ourselves,
would ever have thought of,
but one that will ultimately prove good for us.*

A.J. Cronin

The above words are thought provoking indeed. It reminds us that there is a way for everyone if only we were open to it. Cast your mind back to a time when you were disappointed and a bit disillusioned with your life. Were you hoping for something to happen that would make a difference but not exactly sure what you were looking for or putting in no real effort to achieve it? Where did your disappointment come from?

We are all inclined to look to others to find our way through the maze. Yes, we need their support but at the end of the day the way through the maze of life is ours and ours alone to figure out. If you are inclined to give up too easily and replay negative thoughts from the past does the phrase 'why do these things always have to happen to me' sound familiar to you? Consider this, everyday each one of us tries to do our best in any given situation. It is when the going get tough and how motivated we are that will influence the outcome and the doors that will open to us.

So you may not get the answer or outcome that you were looking for the first time, did you ever think that perhaps it was not the right one for you? The difference in the outcome is whether or not you give up or keep trying to find your way through the maze to and be receptive to some other door opening to you!

**It is only possible to live happily ever after
on a daily basis**

Anon

Peace at last

Real peace can be difficult to come by these days. Perhaps you live in a noisy household or work in a busy office or factory. Indeed when you sit in your car you may immediately put on the radio just to get away from the silence. What would happen though if the next time you drive to work or have dropped the children off somewhere if you were to sit for while with that silence? My guess is the first few times you would be tempted to turn the radio back on but after a while you may enjoy the peace. Peace at last for your thoughts to centre themselves and an opportunity for a more positive you.

It's easy to be busy and not so easy to give ourselves some head space to clear our minds. Going for walk may help to get you started. Ask yourself the question do you really need those headphones as you take some exercise? What purpose do they fulfil? Is it to block out the outside world or is it to block out your inner thoughts? Again when you go for a walk is it really necessary that you be contactable at all times? Why not leave the mobile phone at home and enjoy what you are doing as you walk on the beach or around your neighbourhood. You may be surprised at the difference it will make when you see things with a clearer mind with a spring in your step.

Peace is there for all of us to avail of. It's in the car, at home away from the daily routine and most of all in our inner self. The difference is be aware of opportunities of availing of it and be open to welcoming peace in many different places and situations.

Make time your friend

You may be familiar with those around you (or even yourself) saying that there is not enough hours in the day. These days our lives may be packed with never ending activities and demands from those around us. The funny thing is that time has not changed but what has changed is our relationship with it and this is all the more evident in 2010. Somehow we feel that we need to do and be everything to everyone. Quite often we may be the ones who are left out of this equation. Today why not look at how you manage your time and how it can be your friend and make it work for you.

To realise the value of time think about those you know or even yourself who have escaped serious injury as you were just short of being in the wrong place. Also remember the Olympics and those who were just pipped at the post in their medal efforts? Consider the difference even a few seconds would have made in the above situations. Time in whatever quantity is very valuable in any situation and the way we view it shows a lot in how we interpret it.

So let's imagine in your normal day to day life you have a list of tasks to do. As you get near the end of the day you may find that there is still quite a lot to do. Your immediate thoughts may turn to that which is undone. This will only give you negative energy. However, if you look at your list and think well 'I did my best with the time available and look at what I actually accomplished '. Imagine the difference it will make to your interpretation and value of your time.

It's a matter of looking at things in a positive instead of a negative way. Looking at time negatively will sap your energy and you will find it very difficult to make it your friend. Valuing the time you have spent in a positive way will encourage you to feel better about yourself. By recognising your efforts to do your best with the time available, you may realise in making time your friend your focus will be a positive one on your efforts and that can only be good in the long run.

Clues to your success

It would not be practical to set goals for every little thing you do in life, however, it is important to set goals for the main areas of your life. In doing this you become aware of your intentions about why you are (or not!) doing something and whether or not outcomes are beneficial. To be successful in setting goals why not try setting some **SMART** goals? **S**pecific goals lead to success, vague goals will almost certainly lead to ambiguity and a place you can let yourself off the hook. Be very specific about your goal and word it in positive terms. So instead of saying 'I want to less stressed' – Why not write 'I want to find out what is causing my stress and how to handle it better'

Measurable – how will you know you have achieved your goal, and in what way will you measure it?

Attractive, is your goal attractive enough for you to work towards it? Or is it just an idea that you think would be great to achieve sometime?

Realistic, is your goal one that is realistic for you and what you want to achieve?

Time framed, as you need to have an appropriate time frame in mind so that you have a date by which you are going to achieve it – so no slacking here!

As you work towards your goal, life will get in the way and you may need to learn to deal with that too. You may go off track for a while but there is no need to lose hope. Your goal will be still intact when you come back to it. So even if you do take a bit of diversion for a while, don't forget to come back and start again. Your goal will still be there as a target to aim towards and bit by bit you will get there. Once you have made this choice everything else too may take on a different perspective because you too are different. That can only be a positive influence on your life and ultimately lead toward your success whatever you perceive that to be!

The best or the worst day of your life?

Recently I was listening to someone being interviewed on RTE Radio 1 speaking about his experience of establishing a business. He started a number of companies but no matter how hard he worked could not make any profit. He was ready to give up and so went for interview with a well known catering chain. However, he did not get that job and on the day that he received his letter of rejection, he felt as if his world had collapsed and was totally dejected. He had family commitments and could not see his way out of the situation. He felt it was the worst day of his life. Not only could his current business not make a profit but also he could not get paid employment. Now years later he recalled that day not as the worst day of his life but the best day. Had he secured permanent employment at the time he would not have gone on to establish the very successful business which he now leads.

So what is the lesson for us in this real life story? Consider this for a moment. Can you think of any situation where you felt all was lost but in the long run it may not have been so bad? Alternatively think that there may be many situations where there is something positive to be gained, but we may not see it for some time into the future. So next time you are feeling as if your day or life could not get any worse, try to think that in a few weeks or months or years time you may have difficulty remembering the depth of angst that you felt at that particular moment in time. Then you can really decide if it was the worst or the best day of your life.

**I am MYSELF
I live and breathe
I think and feel
I love and fear
I hope and value
I grow and change
I am forever becoming me**

Robert Valett

Creating Solutions



How long will you look at a closed door?

You may have heard the saying ‘when one door closes another one opens’. Sometimes though we may have regrets about that closed door. This door may be something in your personal life such as a strained or failed relationship or it may be a tense situation at home or at work that may seem insurmountable at a particular time. However, if you give too long looking at the ‘closed door’ you may miss another door of opportunity which is opening and waiting for you.

Consider this; do you remember a time when you were so focused on something that you could not see anything else? The world had gone on around you but you were fixed on getting what you felt you needed and were due in a particular situation – sound familiar? This may be some injustice that you felt you were the victim of or indeed something which you felt was your due be that at work or in your personal life. Somehow, though if you give too long waiting for something to change in your favour you may lose valuable time moving on with your life. Sometimes waiting for a door to open in your favour may give you more negative energy than it was worth while at the same time you are waiting for your life to change.

By all means do not stop at the first hurdle you meet in a particular situation, use your inner strength to think of creative ways around the area in question. Try your best but there may come a time when you may need to say ‘its time to move on’. Once you get to this point it may free you from the worry and tension of the past and you can move on and recognise new opportunities. Waiting for other people or situations to change may be a fruitless wait and perhaps what needs to change is you, when at last you allow yourself to see a new door of opportunity.

Do you give up easily?

Do you know someone who gives up easily at the slightest disappointment? Somehow when things start to go wrong they allow themselves to be blown off course from whatever they are trying to achieve and let their enthusiasm wane? Perhaps this person is a loved one, a friend or work colleague. Perhaps this person is even closer to home and you may recognise yourself as you are reading this page. Why not think about times when we all give up easily and what you can do to change your motivation.

Failure is something that we all experience and sometimes we may feel that life should be straightforward all the time. A wise man once said “*A man who cannot tolerate small misfortunes can never accomplish great things*”. There is much food for thought in these words! Yes, when we embark on something it is great to get a buzz from things going our way and we feel motivated by it. Can you remember a time though when you started out on something be it a diet, exercise regime, cutting back on your work load or whatever the situation. Things may have begun to slip back to the old ways and you hear a familiar inner voice saying ‘told you that you could never do it’ and you doubt your ability. Sound familiar?

One way to counteract such negative thoughts is not to look too far into the future but plan and set small milestones along the way to your goal. By all means set your goal but also plan for set backs along the way. Try not to take whatever it is too seriously and allow for diversions that will inevitably happen. So instead of repeating negative worn out patterns about yourself and others, try instead to start afresh the next day with the experience and new learning of yesterday. Often the search can be more rewarding than the goal.

Do you live in the past?

One thing sure and certain about you and the people you meet everyday is that we all have a past. Be it good or bad we have all come from some place with all our baggage and are heading towards someplace in the future in some shape or form. Another thing is also certain. No matter how much we worry about it, we have no idea how long that future will be!

Experiences in the past have shaped you to be the person that you are today. A lot of your experiences have added value to who you are. However, there are also things in the past that may have shaped you in a negative way and that you still carry around with you today. Think about it now, what about your past would you prefer to forget and move on from? What about your past do you insist on bringing with you and repeating the same patterns again and again? This may result in you feeling powerless in embracing today and the future. However we all have choices but the important thing is to actually make a choice about how you are going to be. Decide today to do something about it if you feel that you are living in the past.

Making a choice will make a difference as somehow you may have evolved into how you are without much thought as to how it is going to affect you today. Think about it now what is it about you that has stayed the same? What is it about you that you want to move on from to fully embrace today and the future? Remember the following saying:

“Don’t live in the past. It’s too lonely, looking back strains your neck and causes you to bump into people and situations coming your way. Instead, by looking forward you will avail of the good things and opportunities that are in store for you”

Which zone are you in?

Why not consider today what zone you are in life. You may be very familiar with your Comfort Zone. Here you feel at home with your surroundings be that a place, job or a relationship. There may be something here which annoys you but somewhere in your mind you shun anything that may change or upset the status quo. Somehow being safe and secure seems much easier than taking a risk to change.

Someday though you might feel you that perhaps you should take a risk. You may be fed up with the same things everyday in your life that leaves you without challenge and fulfilment – welcome to the Stretch Zone. This zone offers challenge and apprehension about something but you do it anyway. Here you may feel more alive than in the comfort zone. Somehow in this zone you may feel too that you are growing as a person and really living. Even though you may not have all the answers, if you stick with it you will increase your confidence. This zone enables you to take the next step towards your own self fulfilment. Instead of encouraging you to give up, it gives you the energy and motivation to keep going towards your goals. The longer you stay in this zone the more fulfilled your life will become.

So which zone is your life in?

Have you taken care of yourself recently?

When you read the title to this page what came to mind for you? Was it a brief thought of ‘nice idea but I don’t have the time’ – or ‘yes, I have because I am worth it’ as the popular saying goes. Whatever your reaction, why not spend a few minutes just thinking about how you look after yourself at the moment (or not!) and what you can do about it.

Yes, life is busy, sometimes though we can use it as an excuse to put everyone and everything else first and ourselves last in a very long line. What if you were to put yourself first sometimes? What difference would that make to you?

If you are unused to looking after yourself then perhaps you will feel a little odd even thinking about it. Consider though the difference it would make if you were to spend some time doing something for yourself alone and not pleasing anyone else. Would you go for a walk, shopping, read a book, or just sit quietly listening to music in your favourite chair? What would you do? Consider it for a moment.....

Could you do just one of the things that came into your mind as you were reading this page? Push away any excuses you may be making for yourself as to why it can’t happen. Don’t make any detailed and complicated plans but just be aware of the need to take care of yourself and the difference it will make to you. Decide to do it as soon as possible and feel the difference. If you like it (which I am sure you will!) make a decision to do it again very soon.

What is your sticking point?

Recently I heard a story of the grass hoppers and the glass lid. Two grass hoppers were in a box with a high glass lid and were very happy as they were able to jump very high. One day their owner decided to change the lid to a much lower one. Pretty soon the grass hoppers were banging off the lid of their box. Eventually they figured out how to cope and jumped much lower thus avoiding the lower lid. Sometime later the owner changed the lid back to the higher one – what was the effect on the grass hoppers? Well they never jumped as high as they originally did as they had learned their lesson and kept within their comfort zone. Consider for a moment - what lessons does this have for us?

Where is your sticking point in life, where do you say, thus far and no further? You may not even have made a conscious decision to act that way but somehow you find yourself staying where there are no dangers and it's comfortable – but is it? If you have tried to change something in the past and were unsuccessful – can you remember what your sticking point was? Was it something that was absolutely beyond your capability or just something that was out of your comfort zone.?

Whatever your reason it may be worth revisiting some situations in your life to unstick yourself. Like the grasshoppers you may have been free and confident in the past but something may have put question marks in your head about your ability and thus your comfort zone took over. Whatever the reason, figuring out your sticking point may be the turning point in embracing a more fulfilled life. So that in the end you too could be jumping higher in life than you ever expected!

Don't be afraid of the space between your dreams and reality. If you can dream it, you can make it so

Anon

What would you do if you were not afraid?

Ever had an idea, wish or dream that you wanted to accomplish and you could almost see and taste what it was like? Great feeling isn't it! As you enjoyed this space did a feeling of fear creep into it and suddenly you find that you are afraid of the what if's and maybes? Your new found enthusiasm may not as strong anymore because you had become guarded and unsure.

Being afraid is all part and parcel of going through life. In a way it may sometimes protect us from doing things that are really not good for us. Think though are some of your fears holding you back from really embracing life and realising your ambitions?

Why not think for a moment if you had absolutely no fear – in what way would your life be different? Would you change your career, travel more, look at friendships and relationships with new eyes? The world may seem a bigger place without these fears and you may see opportunities that you were blind to before. Spend a little time in this space.

When you have come back to reality, really push yourself and think how you would feel if someone else said to you that you could not achieve these dreams and ambitions? Not a nice feeling to be told that and any reasonable person would react against it. Consider this though, that the person who is telling you that you cannot follow your dreams is YOU and YOU alone!

None of us have a guarantee of tomorrow and we only have today to live the life we have ever dreamed of. It's ok to be afraid and recognise your fears but if these fears are holding you back, perhaps it is time that you took a reality check and see how real and reasonable these fears really are. If you addressed and moved on from these fears how different would your life would be? Finally, ask yourself - when will you start living the kind of life you deserve?

What would you shop for if

What would you shop for if money was not a problem or if you already had everything that you could possibly want and need to live a happy life? Would it be a bigger house, better or newer car or would it be some retail therapy clothes, shoes, jewellery, books, hi-fi equipment the list is endless! When you had all those things bought - what would you buy after that? The following may give you food for thought as to what is really important to have on your shopping list for a fulfilled and happy life.

Walking through the shopping centre of life I noticed.....

Joy and Love were in the same shop, Understanding and Patience was on every shelf. Strength and Courage were there too as was Peace and Harmony. To emphasise its importance Good Health had a shop all of its own. Strangely it had a long queue outside of it. These were people who were longing for good health even if just for a short time.

Further down I heard the sound of people enjoying themselves and made my way towards it. Happiness was the name of the shop and everyone was smiling and laughing. It appeared as if there was a special promotion with Laughter as their celebrity guest

As I made my way towards the exit, I pondered on the shopping centre of life, I thought about how items in the shops did not have a price tag or a refund policy or indeed receipts. Instead everything was priceless and once received could not be returned or rejected! The only condition in this shopping centre was the amount of goods you received depended on how much you valued them and on how open you were to giving and receiving each one of them in return

Food for thought indeed! So when next you feel the need to shop to relieve some pressure you are feeling, think about the things you can have free of charge that are essential for a fulfilled and happy life.

Where does your happiness come from?

Happiness comes in many forms. In the light of the Irish wet summers happiness may be a few hours of warm sunshine to gladden our hearts! Alternatively, it could be a relaxed conversation with family and friends. We all have different experiences and expectations of happiness and today let's spend a few minutes thinking about how you experience and appreciate your own happiness.

Life is a mixed bag with good and bad experiences. During these experiences there are times of extreme emotion where we experience highs and lows. Happiness generally comes when we feel that things are good and going our way. However, can we expect happiness to come to us and should we instead make an effort to bring it closer not only to ourselves but those who we come in contact with everyday?

So how would you bring more happiness? Think first about what makes you happy, how could you have more of that? How could you be more open to such experiences? Do you wait until everything is just right to get that happy glow or do you acknowledge your happiness whatever shape or size it comes in? Think about that for a minute and consider if you can find more moments of happiness in places and times that you would not have considered before. What effect could that have on your life? My guess would be that it would have a positive effect but it would also take some extra effort to become aware of and appreciate these times. So why not look for happiness in unexpected places – you may be surprised at what you would find.

If only!

We all have regrets of missed opportunities. Times when we lost out on something be it big or small. Sometimes we had no choice and other times we were indifferent to the outcome in a situation. The reality is though that once those occasions have passed we cannot turn back the clock. However, if we dwell on past experiences it will invariably affect how we perceive the present and future.

So for a few minutes why not spend some time acknowledging the times when you felt and experienced 'if only'. Was it a personal or business situation? What effect did this have on your life? Did it have any lasting effect? Acknowledge these thoughts but then put them aside and consider what you would do instead if faced with a similar situation. This does not have to be in detail but just a brief outline for yourself of how you would start off on the right foot if a similar situation were to present itself again. The advantage of this is that you are ready to change what was a negative experience into a positive one and instead you are looking forward instead of backwards in your life.

So instead of saying if only, and dwelling on the past why not say 'next time I will' and decide what you are going to do instead. The difference is subtle but it does put more of a spin on the situation and enables you to look forward to embrace life and all its opportunities. That can only be good!

What are you grateful for?

We have all experienced gratitude from time to time. Perhaps it was something small such as someone saying ‘thank you’ for some simple deed that we did or it could be something bigger such as a positive response received when you helped out a friend in need. Whatever the situation that gratitude expressed was more than likely genuinely expressed. Today though instead of thinking that others should be grateful for what you have done for them, think instead of what you need to be grateful about in your own life.

Life is much more than any negative situation and so an awareness of and being grateful for the many good things in your life helps to build up your personal resources. Research has indicated that feelings of gratitude greatly contribute to feelings of wellbeing and happiness. Those who count their blessings may be more in tune with the world around them and as a result are more open to positive feelings and affirmations. The author of the well known book ‘The Secret’ also promotes keeping a ‘Gratitude’ journal. This is a book where you write down all that you are grateful for in your life.

Being grateful will not make any of our problems go away but it will put more of an emphasis on what is going well or even just ok in our life (things do not have to be perfect to be grateful for them!). In the coming weeks practice being grateful for the obvious things in your life. Then as the week goes on spend a little more time thinking about the not so obvious things that you are grateful for. Thinking about all the things in your life that you are grateful for will also give you a happy feeling. Try it and see!

Obstacles

A wise man once said '*obstacles are the things a person sees when they take their eyes off a goal*'. Thought provoking words indeed! So today why not think about things you have wanted or are in the middle of working towards achieving in your own life. What happens when you take your eye off the ball so to speak? Whether we are aware of it or not, we all put obstacles in our own way. We can't help it really as somehow on a regular basis we let ourselves off the hook from achieving what we want and need to achieve.

So why do we do it? Could it be that we were not convinced enough about doing it in the first place? Or alternatively could it be that the goal that we pick is too big and vague with lots of room to leave us off the hook at the first place? Sometimes though obstacles can have a positive influence as they make us stop and think if we really want the goal in the first place

So let's get back to the simple goal of getting more exercise. What would help you to achieve it? Would it be deciding to walk two times a week for the first week or so then looking at increasing it if you want. Or would it be deciding from the outset to go walking at least five times a week whatever happens. For some people making small sub-goals works better than ambitious goals and so you may increase your chances of achieving them by breaking goals down into manageable pieces. So whatever your goal is why not try imagining that you have achieved it. What does it feel like having achieved it? Now keep that picture in your mind as you work towards it. If an obstacle comes in your way either self imposed or from outside, work around it but try not to give up. If you need to take a diversion for a little while that is ok too. The main thing to remember is that you will only see obstacles to your goal if you take your eyes off the end result.



**I'm not going to ask questions on a night when
I can see clearly with my eyes shut**

The Proclaimers

Your NOT TO DO list

All of us have things that we need to do to get through life. It could be taking care of others, do paid (or unpaid) work and generally being responsible for our own commitments and actions. There are however, a lot of things that we do not have to do, but feel we should do but we never actually decide NOT do them. Instead we beat ourselves up about not getting around to the long list of things undone from week to week, or even year to year. So how would it be if you were to try to take a different approach?

Look at your life and think about the things you would do if only you had the time, energy and motivation to do them. Now ask yourself – do you ever really intend to actually do anything about them? If there are some things that you genuinely feel you will do (be honest here!), decide a date by when you have them completed.

If there really is something that does need some attention and you are either unwilling or unable to do it, consider getting someone else to do the work instead. Ok, I know that in the present financial climate you may think it would be cheaper to do it yourself. In the past ‘doing it yourself’ was not enough to motivate you, so why should it suddenly push you into action now? Instead find out if things cost as much to get done as you think. Make a few phone calls and you may be pleasantly surprised at what you find out. Even if it does cost you a bit more than you originally thought – what price can you pay for peace of mind for a job well done?

Finally, if there are still some things left undone and you are either unwilling to do yourself or pay others to do them decide to accept this and **LET THEM GO**. Sounds a bit scary doesn’t it! Oh, to be free from the tyranny of those things that we never, ever get around to doing. Let these things go forever and feel the difference as you move on with your life!

Clear communication is important

In these days of ever faster and frequent communication we never had some many ways to keep in touch with family, friends and work colleagues. However, is the frequency of our communications and conversations saying what we really want to say? How many times have you come away from someone and felt that you did not really say what you wanted to? Did you lose your train of thought if your conversation was interrupted or did you lose heart at the last minute and back away from saying what you really wanted to say?

We all know what it is like to have not got our point across. It can leave us feeling anxious and a bit stressed. It might leave some unfinished business that we have to revisit again because something is left unsaid or misunderstood. Either way it may affect how we are until it is resolved.

So if this has happened to you in the past, how can it be different next time it happens? If it is a telephone conversation it may be helpful to make a few notes beforehand to keep you on track. If the conversation is in person, prior preparation may be helpful too. However, you may need to look closer and see if there is a pattern in your life of not saying what you want to say. What is stopping you? Are you afraid of what others may think or do you feel that you are somehow inferior to the person in question?

No fancy words are needed, just plain English will do. You may feel your face going a bit pink or even stumble over a few words. However, the real outcome will be that you got to say what you wanted to say. It may not be easy the first time and you may feel a bit shaky. It will however, enable you to move once you have said it. You never know next time round it may not be so hard!

Feeling stressed and angry?

You know the familiar feeling - one more word from someone in particular and you lose control of your thoughts and what you are doing. It happens to all of us, be it someone who skipped the queue at the supermarket or a child who refuses to do as asked. The problem with getting angry is that there are no winners and only a slim chance that it might solve the problem. There is however a much greater chance that it will create new problems for you.

If we are honest and saw our faces when angry we would know how foolish we look. We may say and do things we later regret. Getting angry is letting someone else control you. In losing control we are giving away or power to them. When was the last time anything good came out of you being angry? Yes, you may need to let off a little steam now and then but try to think of other ways of letting go the stress in your life.

No one benefits from anger so the next time you get angry – take a moment to think whether or not you will remember what was so important for you lose control a week or a month from now? By all means stand up for yourself in a given situation where you feel wronged. Don't give away your power to someone and then regret it later. Remember even if you win the argument you are not making the most of the present, if you're angry about the past.

Problem or opportunity?

If you saw a glass half filled – does it appear half full or half empty? Have you heard people say that they are an optimist or pessimist? Pessimists may declare themselves with an inevitability which implies they cannot change the way they are. However, in life there are always choices.

You can decide to have a pessimist's view; look for the problem in every situation, be self defeating and see the glass as half empty. Do you believe more readily in the negative aspect of every situation, and presume it will be in every area of your life?

Alternatively you can take the optimists view and look for the positive and expect the best. An optimist sees the glass half full, and sees defeat as a temporary set back. Yes, there may be difficulties but as an optimist you will not let yourself be defined by those difficulties. Optimists tend to have better health and success and be more content with their life.

If you would like to change and be more optimistic, try seeing your situation as an opportunity and not as a problem. Focusing on problems will never give you a satisfactory answer. Instead think about finding solutions. This will help to shift your focus. When you think of solutions it will attract answers and enhance your life with positive thoughts!

Dealing with difficult people

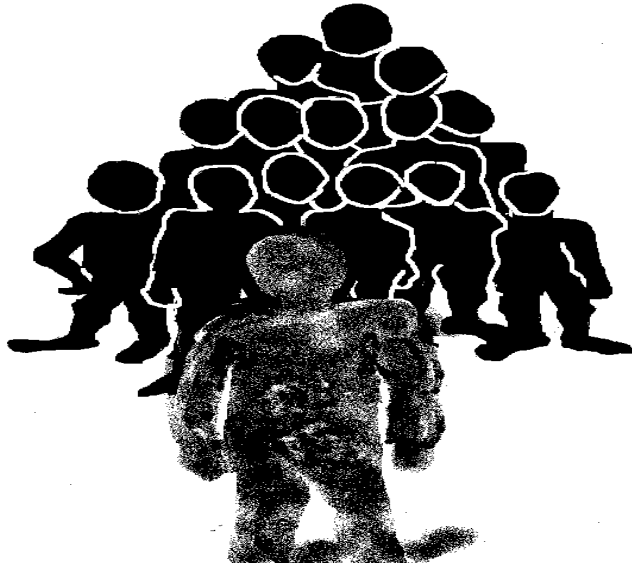
We all know difficult people – it may be a family member, friends, or work colleagues. People who have that knack to set you on edge and wrong foot you by their attitude. It can knock you off balance and encourage you to put up defences.

The next time you meet such a difficult person step back and think about it – who has the problem? Are you giving away your power to those who want to make you as miserable as they are? If you take it personally, you will probably realise very soon that it becomes a spiralling downward trend that is hard to draw back from.

When you find yourself drawn into a negative situation - Stop! Take a breath. Take another breath. Think before you react no matter how easy it is to rise to what is happening – Feeling better? – Now let's start afresh.

Most times people just want to be heard. However, they may not have figured out how to do it without first getting everyone's back up! Listen to them as if it is the first time you have spoken (try not to replay previous conversations you have had with them in your head!). You have no opinion either way about what they are saying. Make sure you are in control of your thoughts not them. Check to clarify what they just said by repeating it back to them. This allows them to really feel understood, and correct any misconceptions. Ask what they see as the solution to the problem.

It may be a challenge to deal with someone that is in a permanent difficult mood, but the effort is usually worthwhile. Try to shift the situation sooner rather than later, remain calm in the midst of the chaos that may be present. Remember not to give away your power to difficult people – take a deep breath and start again - after all it is they have the problem – not you!



**The good man does not grieve that other people do not
recognise his merits. His only anxiety is lest
he should fail to recognise theirs.**

Confucius

Do you want something back?

Doing a good deed brings a certain amount of satisfaction. This might be helping out a friend or relative or a complete stranger. We can feel better having made things easier on someone else and that we have done our bit to make the world a better place. Take a moment though to think why we really do good deeds? Is it to genuinely help someone who needs some assistance or do you too have something vested in the situation. Do you want something back for yourself?

Sometimes you hear people say, 'it's not like the old days any more, when everyone used to help each other out'. Yes it is true, times have changed and we are all so self sufficient and independent of each other now. Or at least that is what it appears to be on the surface! In our interaction with each other how is it different? Do we need recognition and acknowledgement for what we do and if not get into a bit of a huff and think how ungrateful people are? Does this mean not only are we willing to give but want and expect something in return?

So if you help someone out and they forget to thank you or even meet a friend in the street who does not stop to chat, what way do you interpret it? To expect something in return may lead to disappointment and frustration. We may be inclined to think that they have somehow made a value judgement about us and can't be bothered to reciprocate our greeting or our good deed. It's as if we are somehow waiting for someone else's acknowledgement to feel good about ourselves.

What if you were to look at it in a different way? Try doing something because it is what you want to do, acknowledge you have done well to yourself no matter what the other parties reaction is. Take your value from yourself and not from something outside of you, otherwise you may allow other people to dictate how you feel and give your power over to them.

That's just the way I am

Have you ever said 'that's just the way I am?' What reaction do you feel when you say or hear it? Do you think – 'well that can't be changed because I was born that way' or do you feel something stronger like this is an absolute statement about you and the feelings you experience are final and set in stone?

Whatever your reaction, it may be because you are that way because you have learned that particular way of being. Different choices you made have brought you to this point in your life. However, ask yourself this question - if you are not happy with how you are, do you want to continue to be like that in the future?

If you would like to change the way you are think first what you like about YOU. There may be many things that you are happy and content with. Make a list of them and be proud of your strong points. However, if there are nagging doubts about your ability to change particular aspects of your character why not take a closer look at yourself. Do you see a particular pattern emerging where you take a swift turn away from something that is difficult or not you? What does this mean for your life in general?

Why not take a different attitude when next you come up against 'yourself' and 'how you are'. Look yourself in the eye and say "this time I'm going to be different". What could be the worst thing that would happen? You may experience something that you do not particularly like but you have just as good a chance to experience something new and rewarding. If you do experience a 'shift' in even a small way in yourself, you will have taken the first step in breaking the mould of 'that's just how you are' as through new practices, a new way of being can be developed.

So remember 'that is just the way I am' does not have to be something negative. It can be a challenge that is set to see if you can embrace a more fulfilled life. Isn't it worth the risk?

From Q to Quiet

At one time or another during the last few weeks, be it at home or away, you may have had the experience of being in a queue. It may have been in the supermarket, bank or post office. Wherever you were what was your reaction to it?

Were you impatient, stressed, tense, or shifting from one foot to another with your mind bouncing around with negative thoughts? Sound familiar! Most people dislike being in a queue as it makes them stand and wait, stopping their day from progressing. Do you ever notice once it is your turn all negative thoughts you had while queuing disappear but yet at the time they may have consumed you? What if you were to think about it in another way? Instead of looking on it as interference in your day try changing your attitude and see what happens. Why not think of it as a space to be still, a respite from what went on before and what is to follow afterwards.

Next time you see a queue instead of sighing, take a deep breath (maybe even more than one!) and think this time is a space for me to be what I need right now and in the next few minutes. You may find instead of 'wasting time' queuing you may well start to use that time in a more constructive way. Think of it as part of your day that you have no control over and if you have no control over it what is the point in getting stressed?

You Choose

Recently I heard the following story. It has a lot to say to all of us who feel at times that we have no control over our lives. Read it slowly and let it sink in to your thoughts:

Tony is the kind of guy you love to hate. He is always in a good mood and always has something positive to say. When someone would ask him how he was doing,

he would reply, "If I were any better, I would be twins!"

He was a natural motivator.

If someone was having a bad day, Tony was there telling them how to look on the positive side of the situation. This made a friend really curious so she asked him "you can't be a positive person all of the time. How do you do it?"

He replied, "Each morning I wake up and say to myself, you have two choices today. You can choose to be in a good mood or ... you can choose to be in a bad mood. I choose to be in a good mood.

Each time something bad happens, I can choose to be a victim or...I can choose to learn from it. I choose to learn from it. Every time someone comes to me complaining, I can choose to accept their complaining or... I can point out the positive side of life. I choose the positive side of life"

"That can't be easy" his friend replied "Yes, it is," he said.

"Life is all about choices.

When you cut away all the junk, every situation is a choice. You choose how you react to situations. You choose how people affect your mood. You choose to be in a good mood or bad mood. The bottom line: It's **your choice** how you live your life"

Thought provoking words indeed! We are in control of the way we react to people and situations. Sometimes we may need reminding that attitude is everything!

You have the potential

As you look for ways of how to create solutions to life situations the following paragraph may give you some food for thought. Why not read with the thoughts that that you have the potential to do whatever you want in your life. Sounds a bit scary I know but it is true! So consider the following:

We spend January 1 walking through our lives, room by room, drawing up a list of work to be done, cracks to be patched..... Maybe this year to balance the list, we ought to walk through the rooms of our lives not looking for flaws, but for potential”

Ellen Goodman

We are all inclined to look for flaws in our lives, things that we are not so good at and beat ourselves up over. They are the things we see first and we are only human after all. In looking at the rooms and different sections of your life, how would it be if you were to see potential and ability instead of those cracks and cobwebs. You may be surprised at the difference it will make to spend some time in quiet reflection about it. You need not deny what needs to be done but in looking at your ability to change something in your life, think of how much potential you have that is unused. Makes for a different perspective doesn't it!

So if you get side tracked from good intentions don't give up and take on negative thoughts about flaws again. Re-visit your goals and think how will I use my full potential to do what I want in my life?

We lie the loudest when we lie to ourselves

Anon

Are you young at heart?

Are you young or old at heart? Think about your age for a moment, do you really feel that age or do you feel older or younger? So what is your answer? What difference would it make to your life if you lived by the age you feel rather than by the age on your birth certificate? Most people feel younger than they are but just state it as a fact and do not always act on it. As age is just a number, now might be as a good time to live as you feel.

So what difference would it make to live by the age you feel than your real age? My guess would be that you would have an extra spring in your step and feel more optimistic about life in general. Just because you are now X years does not mean you cannot still do all the things you wanted to do or that it is too late to realise some long held ambition. The only person that tells us negative things about our age is usually ourselves, as in a way we are protecting ourselves in our comfort zone. This at times can be good but stay in that zone too long and you may begin to feel your real age!

So today think about what changes you would make in your life if you were to act as you feel and not by your age. Now think about the things in life that you want to do before you get a few years older. Whatever your age it still sounds like you have a lot of living to do – so what are you waiting for!! Start today – you won't regret it!

What are you capable of?

A wise man once said: *The difference between what we are doing and what we're capable of doing would solve most of the world's problems.* These are thought provoking words indeed. Which one of us can say that we use more than the surface part of our capabilities?

Let's think about it for a minute. In emergency situations we can do remarkable things. Rush to someone's aid in an accident, help someone in emotional distress, or indeed go out of our comfort zone and be someone who was there when they were needed in a work or community situation. It is funny though how once the situation is over we can revert back to our old ways and go about our business as usual, but do we? Perhaps when you helped someone out you felt shaken by what was required of you at the time but felt greater well being afterwards? Could this be a clue to the fact that there is much to be gained about pushing our comfort boundaries and being more and doing more than we perceive ourselves to be capable of?

So what are you capable of that you are not doing right now? Could it be that you are capable of doing more with your life but can't be bothered, can't see the reason or are not motivated enough to do something about. A computer is normally used to only approx. 10% of its capabilities. Is your life like that? Are you settling for middle of the road when in some areas you are capable of being more and doing more than you are now?

Where does your energy want to go?

Did you ever wake up in the morning and feel you had no energy for the day? Where your heart sank at the very thought of getting out of bed? Sound familiar? Everyone gets times like the above but if you feel that you are getting more than your fair share of them perhaps it is time to take stock and see where your life is going.

There are many things we do in a day out of habit, necessity and responsibility. However, take a look at your day and see if there are more 'have to do' than 'want to do'. Perhaps you have fallen into a familiar routine and what is familiar brings a certain amount of comfort. Familiarity though as the old saying goes may also bring a certain amount of contempt. If you are one of those who would rather be bored and negative about your day than stretch your comfort zone, perhaps now is the time to change and follow where your energy wants to go.

Think about it – what is the one thing that would get you out of the bed in the morning? Sound like a tall order? it does not have to be out of this world but something which would tick some boxes in terms of satisfaction for you and your life. If you don't know the answer to these questions don't shy away from it but sit with it for a while perhaps for a number of days and weeks even (no easy answers here!) and then go back and ask yourself the same question – what do I really want? As you go through this process let your heart speak louder than your head! Let go of all thoughts of what you feel you should be doing, and follow thoughts of what you really want and deserve from your life.

In taking care of yourself and following the path of where you want to go you will find that the answers are found not in any great far away place. Instead the answers are found inside of you. If you organise your life from the inside out you will notice where your energy wants to go. Following it may make getting out of bed in the morning very easy indeed!

59 Seconds: Think a Little, Change a Lot

A visit to any bookshop will show you that there is a lot of interest in personal development books. Once such book is *59 Seconds: Think a Little, Change A Lot* by Professor Richard Wiseman. Written in 2009, this book challenges the standard self help advice by advocating that your life can be changed by reflecting less and taking more action. In effect *59 Seconds* is about how to make rapid change happen in your life.

In this book the author takes the best from research and challenges many of the views of previous self help books. For example, Wiseman suggests although valuable, popular methods may take too much time for the busy individual. Instead he focuses on techniques that do not take too much time to implement but nonetheless can make a positive contribution to our lives.

Achieving a goal is an example of one of the areas dealt with in the book. Standard personal development books advocate imagining achieving the goal as assisting towards its achievement. For example this could be losing weight, getting a new job. In *59 Seconds* the author argues that instead of fantasising (which may make you feel momentarily happy but won't change anything!) it is more beneficial to think about the steps involved in getting to the goal. This in turn creates motivation towards action and you guessed it *CHANGE!*.

59 Seconds: Think a little, Change a Lot may be viewed by some as a tongue-in-cheek approach to personal development. However, even the most sceptical personal may be intrigued by Wiseman's book. It presents a new and innovative approach to personal change and its quirky techniques are certainly worth considering!

How is your motivation?

We often hear the word “motivation”, sometimes in a context like “what’s wrong with you is that you are not motivated”. Motivation enables us to be interested and alert to events which are around us be it at home or at work. It can affect how we feel, think and act. Motivation is not something that visits us from time to time from a land far away, but comes from deep within ourselves and drives us as we live our life.

We are all familiar with friends and family saying ‘there are so many DIY jobs to do around the house, I wish I could be more organised and get them done’. ‘I wish I could get my act together and change X about my life’ etc. Perhaps it is not the organisation that is missing but the motivation. This lack of motivation may spill over into other areas of life such as relationships, work and numerous other situations.

Try this short exercise. Make a list of the things you would do if you had the motivation. Make an effort to really give yourself the space to think this one through. Don’t give up when the going gets tough. Try not to make lists of lists this only makes the situation more complicated than it needs to be. Perhaps it is not so unwieldy when it is all written down. What does this list look like? To stop you procrastinating and keep your feet on the ground, if there are things on this list that you think you will never ever do – cross them off and move on from them. This should leave you with tasks that are manageable and motivating for you. What would be the first thing you would pick to give yourself a kick start to achieving your goals? Pick something easy that will give you a feel good factor once completed.

Motivation gives you options and choices. Whenever you feel demotivated and lacking energy it may mean that in a particular situation you do not know where you are going in life. By having goals and making choices it will give you a direction for your energy.

Update your technique

Are you happy with the life that you have? Or are you sick of the same old routine be it at work or home? Now may be the time for you to update and change your technique. You know the old saying “*if you keep on doing what you have always done you will keep on getting what you have always got*”. Put simply if you are not happy with how you were yesterday there is no point in being the same type of person today as you will get the same results! Thought provoking indeed! So how can you update your technique? Why not try this simple exercise. What are the things that you are tolerating in your life right now, that you feel is not working for you? Ask yourself the question “do I really need to do this, and if it was not there how much better would my life be?” Then pick one example from your list and try it out. It may be that you are a doormat for people, and do not know how to say NO! It may be that you would like more time for yourself but your lifestyle, friends or family expect something different from you. Whatever it is may be causing a bubble of resentment inside you.

You can change your technique and get different results by putting yourself first. If you are slow to do this, think of years of getting the same results in your life. Do you want more of the same for the future? Why not start today to build the type of lifestyle you want for yourself. It could be something simple like setting aside some time where you do not answer the phone when it rings so that you can concentrate on what you are doing. If it is important they can phone back or leave a message. If you want to get fit, meet new friends or start a new hobby. Why not look at how you can do this. Give yourself that space to change the technique of how you are in life. Others may find it challenging that you were not as you were – let them deal with that! You only have control over your own life. It may be just a small step at the start but add to it from time to time. To update and change your technique of how you are takes time. Remember the goal is to get different results from your life, not as you were but how you would like to be!

**What we think or what we know or what we believe is
in the end, of little consequence.**

The only consequence is what we do!

John Ruskin

***All you have is today,
with no guarantees
about tomorrow!***

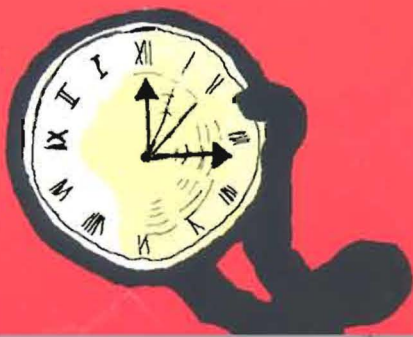


It's Now O'Clock is about living your life in the *NOW* of the present time which urges you to leave aside worries and concerns about yesterday and tomorrow. Instead, by focusing on the present, this book will give you valuable insights that will help you make the most every day, be it in your personal or working life.

With this positive focus in mind, *It's Now O'Clock* will encourage you to create solutions to life challenges as opposed to analysing problems. It will be of interest to young and old alike and the only requirement is that you are open to living fully all the days of your life!

Mary Lawless, BA, MBS, ACC has a background in life coaching and believes that we are all capable of making more effective life choices. To do this we must believe in and trust ourselves to take the obvious and not so obvious opportunities that are presented to us every day. It's Now O'Clock is her first book.

Proceeds in aid of the South East Radiotherapy Trust



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